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BIG FOOT WALLACE, THE KING OF THE LARIAT; Or, WILD WOLF, THE WACO.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON," ETC., ETC.



"HURRAH FOR BIG FOOT WALLACE!" "CHALK ANOTHER FER THER KING O' THER POST OAKS!" "HOOP-LA! SET 'EM UP FER THER BOSS SCOUT O' THER SOU'WEST!"

Big Foot Wallace,

The King of the Lariat;

OR

Wild Wolf the Waco.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"

(MAJOR SAM S. HALE).

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CAR SON, JR.," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DOOMED.

"Poboe pablito! Poboe ceti!"

This outcry came from a Mexican woman, and was in a loud tone, filled with anguish the most intense, and mingled with heart-rending horror, as the speaker sprung wildly forward, fell prostrate on the plaza, and clasped in her arms a small boy that had just been trampled to earth by a galloping steed ridden by a swarthy and villainous looking Greaser, who was evidently well "primed" with the favorite beverage of his country—mezcal.

That this cowardly act was observed, by men who were ready and anxious to avenge the little muchacho, will be seen by what immediately transpired within twenty paces of the scene.

"Thunder an' blazes, Wallace! what yer a-loosenin' yer rope fer? We're in San Antone, an' not 'mong the post-oaks. Reckon yer must be b'ilin' over with pison."

These words were spoken in a quick, astonished tone, by a strongly-built Texan, as he observed his companion, by a lightning-like movement, jerk his lasso from his revolver, over which it hung loosely, the pistol or course being in his belt.

"Star' outen ther way, an' take a squar' gaze at me! I'm sober, plum up an' down, an' means speedy biz!"

"Why, in Crockett's name, didn't yer say so fust off, without axin'?" And the questioner sprung aside from his companion, who was a man of more than average size, and seemingly of extraordinary strength.

The giant borderer drew back his right shoulder, the well-greased coils of the rope waving snake-like above his head; he then gave a forward swing to his whole body, the raw hide at the same moment leaving his hand and hissing through the air. The deadly noose flew over, and then sunk about the neck of the Mexican, who, as luck had it, had been swerved toward his fate by obstructing wagons. Only an instant was he conscious of his danger. The next he was twitched from his prancing, spur-maddened mustang to the ground by so powerful a hand that his head struck the hard earth, causing him to lose all consciousness.

In a moment the plaza was a scene of uproar, all rushing to the point of commotion where the dexterous lassoist stood, his foot upon the man he had jerked so quickly from his saddle.

The Main Plaza of San Antonic de Bexar, Texas, where this scene occurred, is a very large square, and was at this time partly filled with the wagons of rancheros, the burros of the Mexicans, and people of all garbs and nationalities.

"Hurrah for Big Foot Wallace!"

"Chalk another fer ther King o' ther Post Oaks!"

"Hoop-la! Set 'em up fer ther boss scout o' ther Sou'west!"

These shouts, and others of like character, filled the air from all sides, and in a perfect polyglot; for men of all nations, that is honest men, loved the giant scout of the Lone Star State.

As has been mentioned, Big Foot Wallace was a man of large build, as well as a model of strength.

He was clothed in buckskin breeches, tucked into huge cow-hide boots, a coarse woolen shirt and black sombrero with wide brim—all these garments showing much service—in fact, Big Foot never felt easy and natural when he had anything new about his "make-up," for, in purchasing a sombrero, for example, he would kick it up and down the plaza until it resembled a hat somewhat worn, and roll around camp, "ter git," as he would say, "ther stiffen' outen fresh leggins er shirt."

Appareled as he was, having also a huge bowie-knife and a brace of old-style "Colt's sixes" in his belt, one would, upon glancing at his stalwart form, his bearded face, and having heard his peculiar mode of expressing himself, suppose him to be a rough, perhaps heartless, brawling borderman; but it needed only one glance into his mild blue eyes to prove to any intelligent person that Wallace was as kindly as a woman, and as innocent as a child.

His prodigious "understandings"—not that they were disproportioned to his frame, to any very noticeable extent, but seemed larger than they really were, from the fact that he insisted upon his boots being "roomy"—had given him his sobriquet.

With a heartfelt "Gracias a Dios!" as she ascertained that her boy had not been killed, the Mexican woman, with assistance from some kindly hands, had borne the injured lad to her home; in her deep anxiety, and maternal solicitude, neglecting to thank the man who had punished the coward, who had apparently acted purposely and in malice.

As the yells of the crowd subsided, all became anxious to learn the name and character of the miscreant who lay senseless in their midst.

"By ther grim Moses, Wallace," said his comrade, known as Post Oak Bill; "yer made that rope whiz, like a whip snake, er a streak o' chain-lightnin', and ther yaller kiote struck dirt like es if a pound o' lead hed bored him. Who ther dickens air he? Does anybody hyer reckernize ther puserlanimus galoot?"

"Hit 'pears ter me," put in a looker on, "that he's a Rio Grandner, by ther cog' o' Mustang Jim."

"Jim war suspended last week," said Big Foot.

"Reckon you lost a lariat about that time, didn't you, Wallace?" asked a bystander, laughing.

"Ya-as, I chipped in ther heftiest part o' ther plata, ter purchase Jim a serviceable neck-tie."

"Mebbe so ther Greaser hed a grudge ag'in ther boy er ther woman, an' we kin find out suthin' by her 'bout ther yaller cuss," suggested Post Oak Bill.

"Thet war a high-fly plug he, rid, what hed chawed a power o' ther bestest Texas mesquite-grass in hit's day, though hit hain't waltzed round ther perralars more'n four year. Who kerral'd ther critter? Reckon I hes a claim on ther animile."

"Bob Cayle has got the horse stabled, subject to your orders, Wallace," explained a citizen.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the giant scout. "This air a good one! Ef I should git up a lynch picnic, makin' ther yaller belly ther bestest *draw*, Bob would hev me foul; fer I owes him more fer terrantaler juice than ther critter are wuth!"

The crowd laughed heartily, and Big Foot added:

"He 'pears ter lay still enough now, but hit hain't bin long since he war on a yellin', prancin' hooraw."

"Ther tumble yer gi'n him, would 'a' made a "big-horn" sick 'nough ter puke, pard," said Post Oak Bill.

"Reckon we'll hev ter 'low him time enough when he comes roun' ter biz, ter pray a leetle, 'fore we gi'n him a whiz toward kingdom come. He won't never be no nigher that-a-ways than a live oak er a mesquite limb. I've knowned ther condemn'd skunk all along, boyees. He's one o' Cortina's boss butchers, an' come hyar-a-ways on ther spy. I 'members onc't, when my leetle pard, Buckskin Sam an' Reckless Joe, was with me on a sort o' a loose scout down Nueces way, that we struck a camp o' Greasers what hed a lot o' nags they hed confiscated on ther Rio Medina. Hit war rite when we tuck 'em nappin', an' we just laid ther mostesh o' them out cold, fer kiote lunch. I gut a far sight o' this gerloot's face by camp fire light, an' friz hit down in my brain-box fer futur' use, fer he lit out speedy ter kiver, an' stomped lively fer ther Rio Grande.

"We tuck ther stock back ter the Medina, an' foun' that ther yaller thieves hed run in on a kerral, hed a fight ter git away with ther nags, an' hed wiped out three rancheros. One on 'em, what war bored clean through ther brain-box, war a pard o' mine; an' I swored then, ef I ever run across this yaller hyena, I'd hang him up fer seed. When I see'd ther pepper-eater stomped his critter over that

leettle kid, I made ready ter take him a flyin'; but I hed no idee he war ther meat I hed bin gazin' arter, though when I sent raw-hide arter him, I felt right peart an' good from sculp ter toes, fer I knowed at onc't I hed gut ter ther end of a keerect trail.

"Dang ther long-ha'red, short-legged son of a raw-hide scraper! He's hed consider'ble ter do with Cortina, fer Sam gut a sight o' him in a scrimmage at ther Carrizo scrape. He hev mixed right smart with white folkses, an' could make some big buzzard-fly's in purty pure 'Nited States lingo. But, boyees, he's beginnin' ter come back ter Texas ag'in. We'll gi'n him a few breaths o' San Antone air, an' then a telegraph send-off ter Tophet."

The Mexican showed signs of returning consciousness, groaning heavily, kicking and tossing his arms wildly about, while his ruffianly features were contorted with pain.

"Thunder an' blazes!" exclaimed Post Oak Bill. "Let's cut off his wind, boyees, afore some 'fresh' comes along an' gits a sight o' his beautiful pictur'! He air enough ter scare a woman inter a dead wilt et any time, but I'll sw'ar, es he 'pears now, he'd stomped a kavyard o' nags, by jist smilin' in his lovin' way at ther critters."

At this moment an American youth came in haste through the crowd, elbowing his way, and springing to the side of the giant scout, when he touched his hat brim, saying in a respectful tone:

"I believe I have the honor of addressing Mr. Wallace?"

The King of the Post Oaks glanced down into the face of the youth, in some surprise and bewilderment.

"Ya-as," put in Post Oak Bill; "that must be ther man ye're a-huntin', but yer needn't ter mister my pard fer hit makes him sick, an' he kin dress hisself without troublin' anybody, fer he doesn't skin off his togs only onc't er twic't a moon, ter take a soak with ther gars an' cat-fish, jist ter be sociable like."

The youth looked in wonder at the speaker, and also in some impatience; and when the communication was brought to an end, he quickly passed a delicate note into the hand of the giant scout, who received it with even more surprise than he had the introductory words which preceded it. The young man now said, in explanation:

"Big Foot Wallace—if I may be so familiar as to call yer thus, which, upon second thought, I acknowledge I ought to have done at first—a lady, a young and very beautiful lady gave me that note to deliver to you. She is in yonder Dearborn, to which two fine horses are attached. I advise you to read the letter at once, or you will not be favored by a sight of her, as they are about to start from the plaza."

The face of the scout was now a study. Confusion, perplexity, and even apprehension, stamped themselves in turn upon his features, settling down to the latter feeling, as he held the epistle between his thumb and fingers, at arm's length, as if expecting the thing to explode.

Post Oak Bill roared with laughter, as also did many of the bystanders, for they all knew that the famous scout and ranger would much rather take his chances in a charge into a Comanche war party, than to be forced to converse, or make an attempt that way, with a woman, old or young, for ten minutes.

"Hyer, leetle one," he spoke up at last, "thar's a peso fer yer, ter pay fer pickin' up yer heels lively an' skutin' fer them wagons ag'in. Tell ther drivers that ef they doesn't hump themselves, an' git outen San Antone in two flip-flaps of an alligator's tail, Big Foot 'll scoop 'em in outen ther wet; fer I sw'ar by ther blood o' Crockett I wouldn't sling tongue fer five minits with a female woman for fifty saddle-nags. What in thunderation does ther caliker-kivered humans mean by gittin' cl'ar outen civilization?"

Frightened at the amount of trouble he seemed to have been the agent in bringing upon the noted frontiersman, the youth rushed back through the crowd to perform his errand; but, before he had gone ten paces, Bill Lambert, a young pard of the giant scout, volunteered to relieve his prairie friend from his embarrassing position, by reading the letter. Opening it, therefore, Bill read, in a tone which could reach the ears of Big Foot and Post Oak Bill only. It ran as follows:

"MAIN PLAZA, SAN ANTONIO.

"To Big Foot Wallace (so-called):

"RESPECTED SIR—You will, I trust, pardon me, a stranger, for addressing you; but your noble conduct just now in punishing that despicable villain, prompts me to express to you my heartfelt thanks. I witnessed both the cowardly deed and its punishment, and I wish to say that, in avenging that child, you also unknowingly avenged an insult thrust upon me by the same dastardly Mexican, but a short time previous.

"The wretch rode directly up to the wagon wheels, leered in my face, and said, 'Senorita, I know you and your trail. I will embrace you before your wheels cut the mud of the Rio Frio.' We had just arrived in San Antonio. No one was with me at the time, and I dared not inform my father as I feared he would shoot the Mexican before leaving the town. My father, Colonel Thomas Bowen, is now on his way to the Rio Frio, perhaps as far as Rio Nueces, for the purpose of purchasing land, and establishing a ranch for cattle-raising. I am his step-daughter only, and my mother is dead. I have a brother, but he left home, under what he considered a cloud, some time ago, and we know not where he is. My father, myself, and five slaves make up our party. Father was a colonel in the Seminole war, and laughs at the idea of danger, but I confess I am far less confident of reaching our destination in safety. I have just learned your name.

"If a young man named George Adler applies to you for information in regard to us, please direct him on the right trail, but none others. I sincerely trust you may see my father at some one of the camps, and warn him, if he is entering upon dangerous ground. We intend, I believe, to cross the Medina at the nearest ford, following the Fort Ewell trail. I would like very much to meet you, but as time is up, I am not likely to have that pleasure at present. My father has been absent the last half hour, but is now returning. Once again I thank you, and subscribe myself, with your permission."

"Your friend, very gratefully,

"BELLE BOWEN."

Big Foot Wallace dropped his lariat, and embraced his beard with his left hand; by this means pulling down his lower jaw as if forcibly opening his mouth in that manner, at the same time ejecting a squirt of tobacco.

"By ther bleed o' ther victims o' Goliad, ther Alamo, an' ther black-bean braves o' Salado! Ther cantakerous kiyote sha'n't hev time ter say 'Now I lay me'l Snatch ther lasso, Post Oak, an' I'll scrouge ther hellyun along. Come on fer the Mil'tary Plaza. Bill Lambert, glide speedy fer Sol Childers an' Mart Campbell. We'uns wants some o' ther Vigilantes with us, fer this hyer burg air under the'r jurydick. Now, yer mangy snake, what never shed yer p'ison skin, whoop up! I'm arter yer, an' I'm b'ilin vitri'l mad, rite outen ther ruts o' my ha'r!"

So saying, and hitching up his belt at each side by a jerk with both hands, he made one step forward, grasped the Mexican, who now lay with his eyes distended in terror, jerked him to his feet, and pushed him along toward the Old Post-office on the southwest corner of the Main Plaza.

Directly in the way, stood the two wagons that had been brought into notice by the letter; and Big Foot, although filled with rage, became suddenly aware of the fact, and his gaze was for a moment transferred from the Greaser to the Dearborn. The sight was well worth looking at.

A beautiful girl was leaning from the wagon, and for an instant the eyes of the King of the Post Oaks met hers. A slight wave of her handkerchief forced the borderer to lift his sombrero in return, although a hundred eyes were bent upon him. Then he again fixed his merciless gaze upon his captive, and pressed him forward in longer strides. The two scouts and their prisoner were followed by a crowd of men, their hands on their weapons, while the Mexican residents, with ashen features, flitted to the right and left.

Few, probably, of these last, had any sympathy with the condemned man; but all knew that, upon the slightest cause, a rupture might occur, when the loyal Texo-Mexicans, who were many, and a high type of manhood at that, might come to grief from no fault of their own.

On, past the post-office, went the crowd, turning around the corner to the west. Not more than a pistol-shot in space was traversed, when the concourse were in the Military Plaza near a solitary mesquite tree, upon which many a ghastly corpse had whirled and swayed in the moonlight—or daylight either, for that matter.

Here, at the very spot where the dashing horse-thief and desperado, Bob Augustine, was hung by Mitchell's Vigilantes, Big Foot Wallace brought his captive to a halt with a jerk, the wretch not having uttered a word during his short, but dread *jornada del palo muerto*.

The giant scout made a gesture to Post Oak Bill, who at once cast the end of the lasso over a limb; and, at the same moment, Sol Childers, Martin Campbell, and others of the San Antonio Vigilantes arrived upon the scene.

The dense crowd formed a crescent on the plaza, the points of which were close under the projecting water-spouts of the Old Mexican adobe buildings; and the mass of people blocked up the way to the fatal tree, while down the street beyond the place of execution, stood a dozen men, with cocked revolvers to prevent any interference.

"Hyer's meat ready ter hang up ter dry, Sol," said Big Foot to Childers, as the latter approached. The scout spoke in a low, deep tone. "He hev bin brash enough; fact air, he war more blusterin' than a fresh-roped four-year-old steer, but he's purty well cowed 'bout now. He hev senserly concluded that he's gut ter ther eend o' his rope. He's caved in, wilted, slumped inter his butes, an' ain't peart enough ter jerk up easy."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE LAND OF FLOWERS.

SOME fifteen years previous to the time of the incident recorded in the foregoing chapter, there resided in Wakulla county, Florida, a widow lady whose name was Agnes Duval. She had two children, a boy and girl—the former named Edward, the latter, Belle.

The husband of Mr. Duval had died, leaving her quite wealthy; she having a large plantation, and an unusually large number of slaves.

At the time of which we write, the boy was seven years of age, and his sister four; and both were, the greater part of the time, under the care of an aged negress.

Agnes Duval was but thirty years of age, and was remarkably handsome; she had, therefore, a host of admirers, though among them, doubtless, were many who cared more for the wealth than the widow.

However, there was one, a widower with one little boy, the owner of a neighboring plantation, who devotedly loved Mrs. Duval, and was a constant visitor. His name was Frank Adler, usually known as Major Adler, he having served in the Seminole war in that official capacity.

His son was named George; and, as the little fellow needed a companion, the major adopted a lad of about the same age, whose name was Dudley Duncan, the father of whom had been an intimate friend of his in their younger days. Both the boys' parents were now, however, dead, and the little fellow had been left in abject poverty. It was therefore charity in Frank Adler to adopt the orphan child of his friend, though, as the sequel will show, he had bitter cause to regret having done so.

Whether Major Adler would have succeeded in winning the widow, if an unexpected actor had not come upon the scene, we do not know, but his hopes were suddenly blighted by the arrival of two competitors, who drew the attention of every one wherever they went. They lavished their money on all sides, had their own horses and servants, and had every appearance of being wealthy.

The two dashing strangers were Colonel Bowen and Captain Jack Ames; the latter being a widower, or professing to be one, and having also a son about eight years of age. The habits of both men were by no means good, but that did not prevent them from mingling freely in the very highest circles. Both paid marked attention to Mrs. Duval from the first; and this caused Major Adler, a most excellent and worthy gentleman, to absent himself from public gatherings, not caring to witness what gave him the greatest pain and annoyance.

But, to understand the real character of these two strangers, we will take the liberty of playing the spy, by listening to a conversation which passed between them, some two weeks after their arrival in Wakulla. At this time, they are both seated in their room at the hotel.

"I say to you most emphatically, Tom Bowen—Captain Ames seems somewhat excited—"that this thing can't go on in this way much longer. We have had a streak of bad luck lately. At that last trip of mine to Tallahassee, I lost a cool five thousand on the races."

"Well," Colonel Bowen answered, indifferently, "what are you going to do about it? We can't start a bank-note manufactory—more's the pity! Perhaps our luck will turn."

"Suppose it does? We have nothing to

work with if it should. Between us, we couldn't muster ten thousand if we sold out everything. I am a man of the world, and I have no personal friends that I care a fig for, except yourself; but I have heart enough left to wish to leave little Frank something when I flip my last card."

"That's right, Jack! I've often thought of Frankie myself—'pon my word, I have. But cheer up, old fellow. He'll be all right. We'll make a big stake yet."

"There is only one way that I can think of, Tom."

"What have you got in your mind now, Jack?"

"Just this. The only way that I can see to retrieve our shattered fortunes, is for one of us to marry Mrs. Duval."

"Not a bad idea, Jack! Well, why don't you propose?"

"Tom, I'm not quite equal to it. She is pretty, talented and rich—everything, in short, that a man could wish for in a wife—but, for all that, she doesn't suit me. I don't know why, but so it is. Will you marry her, Tom?"

"She wouldn't have me."

"But if she would, are you willing to be the sacrifice?"

"I think you might count me in, Jack."

"Well, I'll bet you a square thousand I can bring things around favorable to that end, at short notice."

"I take the bet; and double, if you say so, Jack!"

"Done! Now, Tom, I think I understand women better than you do—in fact, I am positive of it. You are too slow. Now, isn't that the case? Own up."

"You have hit it, my friend."

"Here's my plan, then; but, mind you, there must be an entire change in your course toward the widow. You have been rather reserved all along. You must now court her society, and make her believe by your every word and act that you adore her. I will just whisper in her ear that you are rich as Croesus. But you must give me your note for twenty-five thousand dollars, and take a solemn oath to marry my Frank to Belle Duval, when she is of suitable age to marry."

"Of course you may not be alive at that time; but to make a sure thing of it, you must influence the widow to make her will to that effect. What think you?"

"I can manage it, I dare say; and if I should outlive her, there will be no trouble about the children."

"Tom, let me whisper just one thing. Suppose it did not work to suit us after you are married? In that case, would you—bend nearer, old fellow—would you give her a dose to send her over the Styx, if there was no danger of being detected?"

Colonel Bowen sprung to his feet, and began pacing the room with nervous strides; and, all the time, his bolder companion sat, watching him closely.

It was plain that Ames was the leading spirit, the man of by far the stronger will of the two. But this was the most serious question he had ever dared to put to his comrade since they had known each other.

"Take a drink of brandy, Tom, and pass me one. It is a matter of want and plenty with you and me now, and we must have our luxuries. You have shot your man, in your time, and unfairly at that—don't get mad now; we know each other—I just want to show you that we have no use for a conscience. We must play this game to win—we must win—we will win. Say no more about the matter. It will work itself out. All I want to know is, will you—if I clear the way—will you marry the widow Duval?"

"Yes, Jack; I am ready and willing!"

"And fill the bill to the letter, as I have put it!"

"To the very letter, Jack—I swear it!"

"Good! That is all I want to know. Meantime, however, you must promise to follow my instructions."

"All right, old man. Anything you say."

"And I swear, Tom, if I should die first, I'll haunt you until you carry out your oath, and see my Frankie married to little Bell Duval."

"You may depend on my doing all that I can."

Thus was everything arranged between these two worthies, and poor Agnes Duval was doomed.

Captain Jack Ames lost no time in beginning his work; and, to do him justice, he did it

well. His friend Bowen was a wonderful man, according to his account of him; the owner of vast possessions in Virginia, of good family, the very soul of honor, and the hero of several famous duels. It was the old story over again. "She loved him for the dangers he had passed."

Up to this time, the fair widow had evidently been more favorably disposed toward Captain Ames than his comrade, but as the former so generously "gave himself away" in favor of the latter, Mrs. Duval unconsciously began to find herself thinking of the elegant and distinguished stranger, whose calls were now made more frequently than before. The end was close at hand.

It was with deep concern and anguish of heart that Major Adler realized all that was going on. When he did, he resolved on making a final appeal and remonstrance. His addresses were firmly rejected, and he was besides reminded by the lady that she was capable of using her own judgment in affairs whether of her heart or of finance. No hope was now left.

Frank Adler disposed of his Florida plantation, and returned to Texas, where he purchased cotton lands, on the Rio Brazos, and spent his leisure in educating his son George, a noble youth, with all the integrity and uprightness which distinguished his father.

Soon after the departure of the Adlers, Colonel Bowen was accepted by Mrs. Duval, and the happy pair left to pass the honeymoon in Cuba. Meanwhile, the festive Captain Jack Ames was left in charge of the Duval plantation; and that excellent individual made good use of his time, disposing of a large amount of sugar and other products, and pocketing the proceeds. His little boy he at once placed in a boarding-school; and then, after an inspection of the plate-closets, he made a trip to New Orleans, where he entered into a contract with a gang of burglars to make a descent upon the mansion, he aiding them all in his power.

Upon the return of Colonel Bowen and wife from Cuba, the former took charge at once of the plantation, thus being able to cover up the felonious acts of his friend. One of the family servants, however, secretly divulged the transactions of Captain Ames to her mistress, soon after her return.

A stormy scene ensued. Mrs. Bowen insisted that Ames should leave forthwith, and the latter refused to go. This, and the frequent interviews of her husband with Ames, made the lady not only very indignant, but suspicious as well. At length, in a fit of anger, she accused the captain of being connected with the disappearance of her plate, and threatened to have him arrested on this charge. This so infuriated him, that he at once demanded a private interview with Colonel Bowen, when he began with the very words he had used on a former occasion:

"I say to you now most emphatically, Tom Bowen, that this thing can't last much longer. There is no safety for me here. A woman is liable to sometimes do as she threatens, and it would be a pretty kettle of fish if I should be brought before a court of justice. Many things would be raked up, and both of us would go under. Do you see things in that light?"

"I see we are in the crater of a volcano," said Bowen, "and I am at a loss what to do. Agnes insists that you are nothing but a low gambler, and forged the letters which induced her to become my wife."

Jack Ames turned aside his face to conceal the fiendish joy that contorted it. Everything was working as favorably for his cause as he could wish.

"Tom," he said, "there is but one road open to safety. You remember that you solemnly swore that if you found, after marriage, that you could not accomplish what you promised as the reward of my services, you would do a deed that would place everything in your own power. I hold your note for twenty-five thousand dollars, and as things are now working, you will never be able to pay it. Neither will you be able, in the far future, to bring about the marriage you have promised between the children. There is just one thing, Tom Bowen—*your wife must die!*"

"Great God!" exclaimed the wretched man. "Has it come to this? Jack, you know, I never dreamed of it!"

"There, that will do, Tom," said the other, assuming a despondent air; "I see you are not the man I took you to be. After all that I have done for you, I must now go to jail, and

Frank will be a pauper! But there is one consolation; you will also be in the same—"

"Stop, Jack! For God's sake, stop right there! You are putting things too strong. I am almost insane with this continual worry. I want peace. You shall have your money, even should Agnes thrust me out into the world. I know that she keeps that much in her private safe, and I will do my best to get it. But I must go now. My brain is on fire. I must ride this thing off, or I shall be ill. Jack, I tell you, those little ones, Eddie and Belle, have greatly changed me. I wish I had been a better man!"

With these words, Colonel Bowen rushed to the stables, mounted his fleetest saddle-horse, and was soon dashing at headlong speed up the river road, as if the Evil One were in pursuit of him.

It was from seeing him, and their consequent fear that something dreadful had happened, that influenced some of the older slaves to depute one of their number, an aged negro who was greatly privileged around the mansion, to ascertain if "Anythin' done gone wrong wid the mist'."

The old man returned with the assurance that all was well; he having seen Mrs. Bowen walking with the children on the veranda. Half an hour after the departure of the colonel, Mrs. Bowen ordered the children to their afternoon *siesta*, and repaired to her own apartment. Adjoining this room was that of the little ones, and a wide door communicated between them. The windows were low, and one could easily step from the piazza into the room.

No sooner had Agnes Bowen thrown herself upon the bed, in a weary, listless manner, than a pretty quadroon girl entered the chamber with a goblet of iced claret which she placed upon a stand, within easy reach of her mistress, who lay with closed eyes, in apparent dreamy forgetfulness. The servant passed out through the children's room, and in so doing disturbed Eddie, who was but half awake; and, as he rolled over in his crib, he peeped between its bars, and through the open door into his mother's room.

As the child did so, he saw the form of Captain Jack Ames steal through a window, and approach the table by his mother's bedside, where, with a scared look, he poured the contents of a small vial into the iced claret. Pondering over this, which he could not understand, little Eddie Duval soon fell asleep.

When Colonel Bowen returned from his ride, he felt calmed, and better in every way. He began to realize how guilty he had been in permitting himself to become the dupe of such a villain as Ames. He went directly to his wife's apartment, passing, as he did so, through that of the children. As he gazed, first at their innocent sleeping faces, and then upon that of his wife, for the first time since he had known her, the scene impressed him deeply. The face of Agnes Bowen seemed angelic. He raised his hand reverently, and mentally vowed that he would love and protect his wife forever, ay, even with his heart's blood.

Advancing to the bed, he called, softly and lovingly:

"Agnes! Agnes, are you asleep, darling?"

No answer came, though it was now far past the hour for her usual afternoon repose.

He placed his hand upon hers, and his face suddenly became livid. He removed his hand, and pressed it over her heart, but its pulsations were silent—stilled forever. Her breast was cold and motionless as marble.

The strong man sprung erect, his eyes glaring wildly with an unspeakable horror, as his hands opened and closed spasmodically, clutching at the empty air; then, with a half-stifled, agonizing cry, drawn in deathly anguish from his inmost soul, the erring man fell prostrate upon the floor beside the bed on which lay his murdered wife.

CHAPTER III.

A FRESH ARRIVAL.

As Big Foot Wallace spoke, Sol Childers walked close up to the trembling wretch, looked in his face an instant, and exclaimed:

"You've done well, Wallace. That's Miguel Rios. We've been waiting him. Send him up, boys!"

Not another word was spoken. The hands of Miguel Rios were tied, the deathly noose was secured about his neck, and the lasso was held by hands that were ready to pull the Mex-

ican high from earth, when the word was given. All was silent as death.

"Have you anything to say, Miguel, before you go to answer for your many crimes, especially in regard to Chiquita Zardila, whom you induced to leave her home in this city, and then having deceived her, foully murdered her near Mission San Jose?"

At the mention of this crime, the wretch's face became almost convulsed with a horror that was terrible to look upon. In a gasping whisper, he muttered:

"Santissima Maria!"

At this moment a rifle shot broke the stillness, and Miguel Rios, with a bullet through his brain, sunk to the earth. As the report sounded on the air, a horse, at headlong speed, galloped from behind the crowd toward the San Pedro. Seated upon the steed was a young and dashing looking Mexican; but a fusilade of revolver shots, hastily sent after him, failed to bring down either man or mustang.

"Dog-gone ther cantankerous cuss!" said Big Foot in deep disgust. "He allers war lucky, an' he's beat me on ther last deal. But string him up, boyees; we'll hang ther galoot anyway, 'fore he gits cold."

This order was immediately obeyed.

"I s'posed ther Rio Grander hed pards hyar," said Post Oak Bill; "an' ye kin jist gamble ther pepper-eater what pulled trigger war afeerd Miguel 'ud wag a loose tongue. Let's 'zamine his pockets, an' see how he pans out in the way of infermashe."

"Dang'd ef yer ain't gittin' kinder cute, old pard," said Big Foot, admiringly. "I bates ter touch ther dirty kiote, but I'll rumage his togs fer the good o' the public."

Forth came first, the inevitable pouch of corn-husk cigarritos, then a few pesos and a Spanish dirk; and lastly, a crumpled letter. All of these were passed by Big Foot to Martin Campbell, he being the only man connected with the hanging, except Post Oak Bill, who remained on the spot. The crowd had left in disgust.

The daring Greaser, who had risked his life and evaded all pursuit, was still in the city, it was evident; and, for all that any one knew, might even now be promenading the Main Plaza. Many had started on the instant in pursuit of him, but there were hundreds of Mexicans of the same size and appearance, and it was impossible to find the right man.

As has been mentioned, the dwellings on the south side of the Military Plaza of San Antonio, were the old Mexican adobes. These houses were but one story in height, with walls three feet thick, which were built the same distance above the flat roof, as is common in all Spanish American countries. Every casa, or house, is in reality a fortress; the windows being without glass, but having heavy iron bars set into the walls, and also protected with thick oaken shutters.

The mesquite tree upon which the Greaser had been hung stood near to the line of dwellings, there being at that day no stores on the Military Plaza; in fact they were but a few feet from the walls, and when the shot was fired that killed Miguel Rios, a Mestizo, or Indian half-breed, crawled along the roof, and peered down upon the party through the thick foliage.

His repulsive features lit up with a smile as he saw that the bullet had done its work; but when Post Oak Bill proposed searching the pockets of the corpse, this expression changed to a scowl of the most fiendish rage. When the crumpled letter was produced by Wallace and handed to Martin Campbell, the Mestizo ground his teeth in a fury, and drawing back, began rolling over on the roof in his insane rage, drawing his cuchillo, or long knife, and cutting the air.

But a short time, however, was spent by him in this way, for, springing half erect, he crawled along to a trap-door and disappeared through it.

When Big Foot ascertained that he had secured all that was in Miguel's pockets, he returned to the Main Plaza, accompanied by Post Oak Bill and Martin Campbell; and all adjourned to the bar-room of George Horner, on Commerce street, where they seated themselves at one of the card-tables in a retired corner of the room.

Had any one of the trio opened the back door quickly, he would have caught the Mestizo, for the latter was peeping through the dusty window upon them, having gained his position of espionage by passing between the

Bull's Head and the Market House, and thence past the rear of the Herald building to his favorable post.

"Martin," said Big Foot, "perceed ter read ther William-duxes, es Joe Booth calls 'em. Reckon ther cuss wan't a 'Nited States mail rider. Fact air, I kin sartify if he war, folkses wouldn't never git nary news from thar friends, speshly of they was 'spectin' money."

"You appear to be a little anxious in regard to the contents of this letter, Wallace," remarked Campbell.

"I is jist on ther anxious seat, pard; 'coz why, I gut a letter ter-day, fer ther fust time in a heap o' years, an' hit war from a kaliker-kivered human. She kinder hinted thet this dog-goned galoot—yer needn't grin; she didn't put hit in jist thet lingo—hed gut some infermashe 'gards whar she was a-goin', an' hit air a big myst'ry ter me how the cuss foun' out her biz an' trail. But perceed, Mart; I'm dang'd dry, but I kin wait fer my irrigate."

"Dog-gone hit," said Post Oak Bill, impatiently, "spit hit out, fer my throat feels like hit war chuck full o' gypsum, an' my stomach 'pears ter hev a right smart scatterin' o' red ants gittin' up a big fandang' on the'r own account."

With a laugh at the eagerness of his two prairie friends, Martin Campbell carefully opened the crumpled letter, which proved to be two different epistles folded compactly together, the two having evidently been forwarded from points far distant from each other.

The first was from Bonham, Texas. It read thus:

"To Mil Diablos:

"Big lay at last. Old man and daughter, with five niggers—daughter very beautiful—on their way to Rio Frio, to purchase land and stock. A heap can be made, if Cap wants to take the risk of running the niggers into Arkansas. The beauty, El Capitan will claim on sight. Remember the lay-out—i. e., a Dearborn, two horses (slam-up team) and a Conestoga, four mules. Watch for them. Then send Juan or Ignatio on the best nag at hand to the chief. He can pick his own ground for his game, but I get a liberal share of the plunder. Adios,

"MIL DEMONIOS."

"By ther tearin' terrantaler o' ther trop-ics!" cried Big Foot Wallace, springing to his feet. "Post Oak Bill, old pard, g'in us yer paw! I'm a-goin' ter waltz up ter ther bar, an' pour down yer a quart o' prussic acid, what'll wash ther gypsum outen yer throat. We-uns wouldn't a' thunk o' s'archin' ther condemned kiote, ef yer hedn't a' shot ther idee at us. Wa-al, dang my panther cat, ef we hesn't blocked a purty durn black game. George Horner, old boyee, just h'ist up yer mammoth corporosity, an' sling out on ther plank ther best chain-lightuin' that ever war kerrald inside a bottle. We-uns is goin' ter hev a fust class XXX jim-jamboree. 'Cos why? I'll sling hit straight at you, an' hit sha'n't cost yer a picayune, George. We hes bin doin' a hefty biz ter-day. Hit's ther honest fac'! I'm a-givin' hit squar'; an' ef yer thinks I'm per-varicatin', ax Martin, er my pard Post Oak Bill!"

Several Texans had entered the bar while the three men had been engaged in reading the letter; and, when the giant scout ended his characteristic "little piece," the room rung with the wildest laughter, winding up with three ringing rounds of cheers for the King of the Post Oaks. Then Martin Campbell informed the crowd that they had found an open letter in the pocket of Miguel Rios, directed to Mil Diablos (Thousands Devils).

Then remembering the second epistle, Campbell invited the two scouts to return with him to their corner; and, excusing themselves, they proceeded to discuss it.

"MIL DIABLOS:

"We have moved camp to the 'Little Drink,' about twenty miles from the trail that opens 'business,' but on the opposite side from 'Mesquite Camp.' Good water, good game, and an easy position to defend against odds. But we can't expect to remain here any length of time, as the scouts and rangers will run in on our outfit when they git the wind of us. The letter you sent by Ignatio gives valuable information. A party have started from East Texas, and there is a dead sure thing on a big pile, if we can 'lay for' the outfit, and take them in; for, besides the cash they have, I am offered a large sum by one I can depend on, for the capture and detention of the girl who is with the party. Look out for a Dearborn and a Conestoga wagon. The owner is Colonel Bowen, and his lovely daughter is the 'wanted party.' Send Juan or Ignatio as soon as they show up, and strike for Medina.

"Yours, till the noose tightens,

"CAPITAN CARAMBA."

"Wa-al, dang my peculiar panther-cat!" exclaimed Big Foot. "I'd give my ole Kentuck shooter ter git a squar' whack at the

Cipitan Caramba. He air ther wustest pill in ther box. Ther question 'fore this congregation now is, hev Mil Diablos sent his yaller spies ter Cap' Caramba with this hyer infermashe?"

"Hit doesn't 'pear," said Post Oak Bill, "es though Miguel hed spit out much ter his pards. He seems ter bin kinder keepin' hit shady, so es ter hev ther bigger chance o' puttin' in fer shares o' ther plunder. Thet's ther way I'm a sotin' him down; though ther cuss what shot him mought 'a' know'd ther thing clean through an' skuted fer camp 'fore this."

The attention of the three men was now drawn toward the bar, by the entrance of four young men who were evidently, judging from garb and manner, fresh from the States, or Eastern Texas. Their costumes were gotten up in an attempt to imitate the apparel of the people of the plains. They appeared weary, and were dusty, as if they had been all day on the road; and when they came in, it was with the air and manner of strangers in a strange land, that they gazed around the room, and at its occupants.

Observing the two scouts, their features manifested great interest and curiosity; and after conferring together for a moment, one of the number came up to where they were seated.

Touching his hat brim politely, he said:

"Gentlemen, will you do us strangers the honor of joining us in a friendly drink?"

"Sartinly," replied Post Oak Bill, thus constituting himself the spokesman; "sartinly, on one condish."

"And what may that be?" asked the young man, smiling.

"Thet yer'll all pour down p'ison with us arterward."

"We shall be very proud to do so, I assure you," was the reply; and the young man rejoined his comrades.

All walked to the bar, the youth introducing himself on the way as Frank Ames from the lower Trinity country.

The Texaas designated whisky as their beverage, and the tumblers were lifted from the bar, clicked and raised upward, when a young man entered the east front door of the establishment, some fifteen feet distant from the party who were drinking.

He had the appearance of being about twenty-two years of age, was some five feet seven inches in height, and remarkably well-proportioned. He had a fair, artistic, Grecian face, handsome and honest, and the glance of an eagle. His attire was similar to that of the strangers who had previously arrived, but was coarser, and the weapons he carried were plain and without ornamentation, as well as having the marks of service.

As the new-comer entered the bar, he threw a quick glance at its occupants; then, hastily drawing his sombrero downward, to screen his face from the men at the bar, he passed directly across the open walk between the card-tables, and then, observing the rear door, opened it quietly and stepped over the threshold in haste.

No sooner did the young man close the door behind him, than a man in Mexican costume, with a long knife in his hand, confronted him, his black, snake-like eyes glaring murderously. But without drawing his weapon, the young man raised his clinched fist, which he shot out with great velocity, planting a most terrible blow in the face of his swarthy antagonist, who fell in a heap to the earth, as though a bullet had pierced his brain.

CHAPTER IV.

SWIFT AND SURE.

DENSE shrubbery grew close up to the veranda, and on the side of the house in which the sleeping apartment of Mrs. Bowen was situated, and the colonel had but struck the floor, when, from the asaqua bushes sprung Captain Jack Ames into the room, and grasping the glass which contained but a small portion of claret, he cast it afar into the bushes, replacing the goblet and vanishing into the dark shades as rapidly as he had come.

Rosa, the quadroon, becoming alarmed at the non-appearance of her mistress, went to ascertain its cause. The children were now up, and playing on the veranda. Upon reaching their room, the girl discovered her master, lying upon the floor, and shrieked with affright, causing the other house-servants to flock around her; all adding their cries, as they

realized that something dreadful had occurred. Not one of them felt equal to approaching their master, and the silence and deathlike stillness of their mistress, as she lay on her couch in that dim chamber, filled them with dread and horror. They all fell on their knees.

At this moment the old slave from the stables, came rushing in with a scared face. Grasping a pitcher of water, he dashed the contents over the head of Colonel Bowen, who groaned for a moment, and then opened his eyes in bewilderment. When the truth, at length, burst upon his mind, he sprung to his feet and threw himself beside his dead wife, clasping his arms about her rigid form.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered himself, the old servant gave a prolonged wail, which was echoed by the other slaves, who were now aware that death was in their midst.

To make the sad scene even more impressive, the children, Eddie and Belle, now rushed into the room; and seeing their mother silent, climbed upon the bed, and began trying to awake her.

But we must draw a veil over this hour of anguish, and hurry on, by a mere mention of the facts which transpired soon after; for more exciting scenes in the lives of those we write of call for all the space we have at our command.

There was, as may be imagined, much comment among the neighboring planters and their families, in regard to the sudden death of Mrs. Bowen, and poison was hinted at; but as no one could have had any motive for such a deed, except her husband, and as his grief had driven him to the very verge of insanity, his worst enemy would not have thought of accusing him of such a crime.

The family physician found no traces of poison, and pronounced the death of Mrs. Bowen as having been caused by disease of the heart; he certifying that she had been so affected from her childhood.

Captain Ames had disappeared on the same afternoon: but this was not coupled by any one with the sad affair, for he had always been in the habit of suddenly appearing and disappearing. But the stricken husband knew well, in his own mind, that his wife had met her death at the hands of his partner and friend; and that, sooner or later, Jack Ames would come and demand payment of the note which he held against him. There was no saying, indeed, what such a villain might not be found capable of doing.

Colonel Bowen, in the depths of his great grief and remorse, registered a vow that he would avenge the cowardly murder of his wife; that Jack Ames, if he ever crossed his path, should die by his hand.

He decided, however, upon instant removal from Florida; and, disposing of the plantation and the greater number of the slaves, he took the two children, and left for parts unknown to the old friends of his wife.

He went to Texas, and there purchased a plantation, within five miles of the estate of Major Adler, a fact of which he was not aware, until some time after he had been settled in his new home.

When Frank Adler first learned that the woman he had so fondly loved had come to her death so soon after her marriage, he had his own suspicions of foul play, and resolved at once to watch over the interests of her children, as well as to keep an eye upon the actions of Colonel Bowen.

The latter led a miserable life, daily expecting the appearance of Ames upon the scene. He had not long to wait. Scarce three months had he been in Texas, when, one evening as he was riding in the dense bottom timber of the Trinity river, a horseman confronted him, and although it was twilight, he recognized his old partner—an exultant and sinister smile stamped upon his face.

Ames appeared to be, judging from his apparel, in reduced circumstances; or, possibly he had assumed his rough garments as a disguise. Colonel Bowen trembled for a moment with long pent-up rage, but soon mastered himself, and became firm as a rock.

"Hallo! old pard," said Ames, "we are well met. I was just on my way to your plantation."

"You are no 'pard' of mine, Jack Ames," returned the colonel, in an icy tone. "When you poisoned the best, the kindest, the most beautiful woman in Florida, and that woman

my wife, you left no feeling in me but one of just and murderous enmity."

Never before, it is probable, was a man more dumfounded than was Captain Ames. Was this the man who had been such a pliant tool of his for years? His old pard, however, must have forgotten the hold he had over him.

So reflecting, he braced himself, put on an air and look of indignation, and demanded in a furious voice:

"Pay me that twenty-five thousand dollars, Tom Bowen, within twenty-four hours, and as much more as I see fit to call for, or I will hand you over to justice as the murderer of your own wife!"

Never did man make a greater mistake. Quick as a flash of light, Bowen's pistol was leveled, the trigger pulled, a blinding flash, a loud report, a heavy groan and a sudden fall, followed by a low, exultant laugh—and all was over!

Like a maniac, the colonel sprung from his horse; loosening the lariat from the horn of his saddle, at the same time retaining the end of the rope, he bounded forward to grasp the bridle-rein of the animal that had been ridden by Ames.

Securing the two affrighted steeds, and drawing his bowie-knife, he went up to the side of his prostrate foe.

"Keep your oath, or I'll haunt you, Tom Bowen! Frank—Belle—" The words came in a gasping whisper, but they fell distinctly on the ear of Colonel Bowen. He heeded them not, however, as he fairly yelled:

"Die, Jack Ames! Die! I'd rather you'd haunt me in death than in life. Die, poisoner of one who never harmed you! Die, craven, dastard—die!"

Again and again was the knife driven through flesh and bone, with the strength and fury of a madman.

This done, Colouel Bowen secured, from the pockets of his old partner, the papers of his which he had held; and then, dragging the corpse to the river bank, hurled it far out into the rolling waters. A splash, and it sunk in the dark river forever.

Thus was Thomas Bowen freed from the curse of his life. But the spirit of the dead man seemed to haunt him day and night, calling for justice.

Knowing where Frank Ames was at school, the colonel sent for the boy, and put him in a similar institution near at hand, but would never allow him to come near the children of his murdered wife.

Eddie Duval, or Bowen as he was now called, never forgot the scene that he had witnessed from his crib, though he never spoke of it, and never saw the face of Captain Ames again. When, however, at sixteen years of age, he saw Frank, who much resembled his father, he sought a quarrel with him, and a duel was speedily arranged between the two boys.

Frank Ames fell at the first fire. Edward, with the impression that he had killed him, took what ready money he had, said farewell to his sister, and fled.

About the same time, Dudley Duncan, the adopted son of Major Adler, absconded with the whole proceeds of the cotton crop, besides forging his foster-father's name for a large amount. This so preyed upon the major's mind that he sickened and died.

Previous to his death he confided to his son his suspicions in regard to the death of Mrs. Bowen, and enjoining upon George to look after, protect, and, if he could, marry Belle Duval.

After his father's death, George Adler was forced to dispose of the plantation and slaves, to satisfy the creditors. He then established himself, with one servant, in a small cabin upon the Trinity, where he hunted, fished and studied, by turns; often meeting Belle, and passing many happy hours away in her company.

It was not often that Frank Ames saw Belle Bowen; but, seldom as it was, he too fell in love with her, and swore in his heart she should be his.

As for the colonel himself, as the years rolled on, he became more and more morose and absent-minded. The last words of his old enemy were ever sounding in his ears. The last look from the eyes of the dying Jack Ames haunted him. The one bright spot in his life was the presence of Belle. Her songs and laughter were his only comfort, and the thought that she might one day be linked for life to the son of her mother's murderer, was

not for a moment to be entertained. Indeed he wanted her with him always; he felt that he would die, were she taken from him.

Captain Jack Ames having been a migratory gambler, with no one who really cared for him, there was no stir made when he finally disappeared; and, as no one seemed to have seen him in East Texas, the story of his death was never even suspected.

Among the papers which Colonel Bowen took from the dead man's pocket, was a well-executed statement, in which the wretch charged the colonel with the murder of his own wife by poison; and the latter could congratulate himself on having thus secured what, had it fallen into other hands, would have consigned him to prison for the remainder of his days.

Belle Duval had received the best educational advantages her step-father could procure for her, and had grown up to be the very counterpart of her mother, of the nature of whose fate she had been kept in ignorance. Her brother's enforced absence was her one great grief.

Little did Colonel Bowen dream that Ames had not only explained their old relations to his son Frank, but had left a sealed statement of the debt of twenty-five thousand dollars, and the contract in regard to his marriage with Belle. This was to be opened and perused by Frank Ames when he reached his majority, and that it was read with interest we may well believe.

Worthless and good for nothing, as he grew up to be, he was not long in going to the colnel, and demanding the money, and the hand of Belle in marriage.

The indignation of the colonel knew no bounds. He ordered the young reprobate from his house, and after he had gone, resolved suddenly that he would again move—this time to some place where he might be safe from the persecutions of his enemy's son.

The love which George Adler bore toward Belle, and the affection which she had for him, were also well known to Colonel Bowen; but he disliked young Adler for the reason that his father had dared to love the woman whom he married, and therefore he vowed that neither should George Adler marry Belle.

Thus matters stood at the opening of our story, except that the colonel had sold a portion of his—or what he called his—plantation, and was then proceeding to the frontier, with the hope of finding some isolated spot, where neither Frank Ames nor George Adler would be able to find them.

His departure with Belle was secret—done in the night—but we have seen, or shall see, that Frank Ames and George Adler are nevertheless on his trail, both seeking Belle Bowen.

CHAPTER V. CROSSES AND CONFIDENCES.

As the young man who seemed to avoid the notice of the occupants of the bar-room passed out, felling, as he did so, his would-be assassin, he walked on, over the prostrate body, which was none other than the Mestizo who was spying from the roof at the hanging of Miguel Rios. Astonished at being thus attacked, the young man paused to notice that the powerful blow he had given had badly bruised the half-breed; but he quietly passed on, after a single glance, between the Bull's Head and Market House, through an alley, and thence out into the Main Plaza, scarcely a pistol-shot away. The party at the bar had not observed him as he went.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Ames, "we are extremely delighted to make your acquaintance. Can any of you kindly inform us if a man by the name of Bowen passed through the city recently, *en route* for the frontier? We are friends of his, and desirous of joining him."

Our three friends exchanged glances. They all remembered that, in the young lady's letter, she had desired that George Adler, and no other, should know of them. For all this, Big Foot at once decided to put these men on the trail, for he felt sure they would come to grief in some way; besides he would keep an eye on them.

"Yer hes struck ther right pilgrims fer infermashe," he said, winking slyly at Post Oak Bill, as he did so.

"Curnil Bowen," said Bill, taking the hint, "levanted toward ther Medina this araternoorn, an' ll probably camp thar ter-night. He has a purty darter in his outfit."

"You saw them, I presume," said young Ames.

"Ya-as, we see'd 'em. But they're goin' ter a dang'd dangerous section, an' I'm glad yer going' ter jine 'em. Yer see that country air chuck full o' Rio Granders, an' 'sides that, 'Paches an' Comanches air liable ter stompede in 'tween ther Medina an' ther Frio, most any time, 'thout sendin' keerds."

"If that is so, we had better overtake them as soon as possible," said Ames, winking at his comrades. "Did the colonel know of these dangers?"

"Can't say, fer we-'uns didn't spoke a word to 'em."

"Well, gentlemen, the sooner we start the better. But how are we to get a mule and some provisions?"

"Better put up at the Menger House," suggested Campbell; "and I can have them ready for you in the morning. I'm in the habit of attending to such matters."

"Many thanks," said Ames; "how much shall I advance you for the purchase?"

"Not a cent, sir, until they are delivered."

"Thanks, again; though I would much prefer it."

"Never mind. I have sufficient cash on hand."

"Gents," said Big Foot, "sculps air a dang'd risky crop ter cultervate down whar yer inclinatin' ter glide, an' I 'vises yer ter use Spaldin's glue for ha'r ile from this on. I'm purpose ter skute toward ther Nueces myself, 'fore many fleetin' periods, ter see ef ther kaller in that outfit air hunk, serene an' right side up with care."

This last remark seemed to slightly annoy Ames and his friends. They said nothing, however, but ordered cigars, as if to hide their concern.

"If you are down that way with your friend, here, we shall sleep in our blankets without fear," said Ames, assuming a cheerful air; "but we must now bid you good-night, hoping we may have the pleasure of soon meeting you again. By the way, can you breakfast with us to-morrow morning?"

Little did Frank Ames dream of the horrors he would pass through before that time; and his friends, if they had known what was in store for them before another sun arose, would have blown their brains out on the spot, if by so doing they could be freed from the horrors and tortures that awaited them.

"By ther grim Moses," said Bill, in reply to the invitation, "we-'uns is 'bleeged, but we couldn't chaw our grub offen plates, an' to sot on cheers would spile our appetites. Menger wouldn't keer ter hev us in his slam-up, 'ristocratic ranch."

"Which way from this is the Menger House?"

"Go right down this street, cross the bridge and take the first left-hand turn," directed Martin Campbell. "The hotel is on the Alamo Plaza."

Thanking him and touching their hats, the four strangers stepped out, mounted their horses and proceeded down Commerce street as directed.

"Wa'al, dog-gone my great gran'mother's old settin' hen!" exclaimed Post Oak Bill; "ef ther reds hain't gut a soft thing thar, I'll hitch onto a Piute squaw an' squat in the middle o' ther staked plain fer ther brief remainder o' my days."

Just then the young man we have before noticed re-entered, coming in this time through the went door, in the rear of the scouts. He stepped into the room briskly, with the look of a man of bravery and will, and advancing to the front of the two scouts, extended a hand to each, saying in a cheery, mellow tone of voice:

"My name, gentlemen, is George Adler. I wish to form the acquaintance of Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill. You can rest assured I am not of the same stamp as the men who have just left you to go to the Menger Hotel."

Without hesitation, the scouts grasped the hands of the young man. There are instances where friendships are thus quickly formed and cemented, but they are rare. The two men were at first dumfounded at being thus, as it were, taken by storm by a stranger, but for their lives they could not resist the magnetism of his looks and speech. Seeing their very natural embarrassment, he called for drinks, and clicking his glass with those of the bordermen, he said:

"Gentlemen, allow me to propose a toast. Here's to Miss Belle Bowen. May her trail

through life be bordered with brilliant flowers of sweetest perfume."

The scouts looked at each other in silence. As things were going, they seemed to be getting mixed in with the affairs and friends of this Bowen family.

"See hyer, pard," said Bill, at length, "yer must 'scuse we-'uns fer lingerin' in this erri-gate biz, fer yer see them four tenderfoots is all startin' on ther same sort o' trail, an' we war kinder sot back when yer shot out ther name o' Bowen. War yer 'quainted with ther curnil in East Texas?"

"Yes; ever since I can remember. Those fellows must have had a spy in the household of Colonel Bowen, or they could not have known of his departure. They have no good object in view, and they shall not know of my presence on the trail, if I can keep it secret. Did they impress you, gents, favorably?"

"Wa-al," said Big Foot, "I shouldn't keer ter be on ther same trail with them, an' be 'bleeged ter count on thar puttin' in a blow ef a scrimmage come on. They pears ter be more like card-sharps than real Simon-pure XXX gents, though they puts on a heap o' style."

"Gentlemen," said George Adler, "I'm a straightforward man, and I never beat around the bush. You know that I wouldn't be following the Bowens without an object, and I'll tell you what it is, for I would trust my life with either of you. I love Belle Bowen, and she loves me; but her father would rather see her dead than my wife. First, because I am poor; and, secondly, because he looked on my father as an enemy to him. Belle's brother is a wanderer, and has been so for years, he having fought a duel with that very Ames who has just left here, and thinking he had killed him, he fled. There is some mystery about their quarrel, and no one, except perhaps Colonel Bowen, knows why Edward so detested Frank Ames. The colonel is taking Belle away secretly for the reason I have told you. Ames is a gambler and a dishonest man, but it is possible that the colonel may be willing to give him his daughter, and there may be an understanding between them in this move. Belle, however, has a strong will, and we are solemnly plighted to each other. She knows that I will follow her, and watch over her. I am aware that it is a dangerous locality through which they have to pass; and I have sought you, gentlemen, to gain information, and, if possible, to enlist you in our service. I am poor, as I have said, but I will cheerfully give you five hundred dollars each to serve me one month. Will that sum be satisfactory? What say you?"

"Hit'll be jist 'bout five hundred pesos too much," said Post Oak Bill. "How air you inclernated ter shoot off on ther ques', pard Wallace?"

"I doesn't want nary a picayune," was the reply. "I'm in ther service o' that angel, an' hes bin since she sent that letter ter me. Hit said she war 'spectin' yer on ther trail, an' she wanted we-'uns ter gi'n yer a straight send-off."

George Adler caught the hand of Wallace, exclaiming:

"What do you mean, pard? You don't mean that she, Belle Bowen, has written a letter to you?"

"Why not? Yer isn't gittin' jealous, is yer?"

"No," said Adler, laughing; "but it seems strange, and I am greatly pleased to know it."

"Thank yer, pard; yer pan out jist 'bout as I—"

Big Foot was here interrupted by a loud noise at the back door, as if some one had fallen against it. The commotion reminded Adler of the villainous assassin he had knocked down, and he sprung forward and opened the door. It was now evening, but the bar-room was brilliantly illuminated, which fact would, for a moment, blur the sight of one looking in from the outside. The Mestizo stood facing the young man, as he swung open the door, on the very threshold.

A most repulsive object he was to look upon. His forehead was badly bruised and much swollen, and blood had flowed down over his face and breast; while, from out the gore, glittered his black eyes with a panther-like rage, as he caught sight of George Adler. Realizing his peril, he half raised his fist, his features contorted hideously, his lips curled like a wild beast at bay, his white teeth tight set and grating; then, like an arrow from the bow, he darted off in the darkness.

"Hit 'pears ter me thet red nigger recker-

nized yer, pard," said Big Foot; "an' hes a heap o' double-distilled cussedness laid up ag'in' yer. I s'posed yer hed jist 'roved, an' hedn't hed time ter buck ag'in' San Antone Greasers. Hes yer hed a argyment with him, what called for somethin' with more vim than 'Nited States lingo er Rio Grande cuss-words ter close up with?"

"No, pard; I never spoke a word with him. I remember having seen him at my elbow near the Plaza House when I inquired in regard to Colonel Bowen's wagons; and when you were drinking with Ames and his friends I came in at yonder door, and as soon as I saw who were at the bar, not wishing to be recognized by the men from East Texas, I passed through to this door, opened it, and sprung directly out. Finding that ruffian in my path—he had no doubt been playing the spy—I had a slight encounter with him. He drew a long knife, and I gave him a stunner between the eyes. It laid him out for some time evidently, as he seems to have but just recovered from it. He may be in the employ of Ames, and I may be mistaken in thinking that Frank does not know I am on the trail."

"Dog-gone my great gran'mother's old settin' hen!" said Post Oak Bill, as he brought his fist down upon the table with a heavy bang, and then rushed out of the room, calling for his friends to join him.

Big Foot and Adler hastened outside.

"Jist look a-hyar, Big Foot," said Bill excitedly, "I reckon I know whar thar's a pa'r o' dang'd fools, an' not far off neither. When we war a-readin' ther letters what we took outen Miguel's pocket, we set at thet table under this windy, an' hyar's a spot rubbed cl'ar o' dirt. Yer kin jist bet yer last lingrin' two-bit piece thet cuss what George laid out war one o' ther same outfit as Miguel, an' thet he air one o' Cap' Caramba's spies!"

"I'm dang'd ef I doesn't b'lieve yer's right," agreed Wallace; "an' I 'gins ter think, pard, yer is gittin' dog-gone smart an' keen o' late. Hes yer tuck in a new stock o' brains?"

"Nary, pard; but I hes enough ter know that ther Bowen outfit never'll see ther Nueces, an' hit stan's a fair chance ter be gobbled up now."

"What does all this mean?" asked Adler, in surprise.

"Hit means thet we hes gut ter hump ourselves ter-morrer mornin' bright an' lively," replied Big Foot; "fer Miss Belle air in some consider'ble danger o' gittin' tuck by ther renegades an' scum o' ther Bravo."

"Then, by heavens!" exclaimed Adler, "I shall start to-night. I do not propose to enter the camp of the Bowens, but just to hover around, and guard them against a surprise. I shall also endeavor to have speech with Belle privately. If you, pard, will follow me to-morrow, timing your speed to strike the night's camp, and arriving unobserved, I shall be rejoiced; and if you can start and keep ahead of those four fellows at the Menger, I shall be doubly pleased."

"We-'uns 'll fill ther bill ter a dot, pard. We kin take keer o' ther four galoots, I reckon; an' we doesn't cross han's with everybody what comes along. Remember thet; an' what's more, thar is but few humans we-'uns pards with; on a trail er off; but I knows a squar' man when I sees him, an' I kinder cottons ter yer. 'Sides thet, I air goin' ter see thet gal through, er lose ha'r; so we air pards from this on. Yer hes solid sense, an' knows yer own biz; but look out fer ther cuss what ye laid out at Horner's back door. He'll crawl on yer ef thar is ther leastest show. Ef yer strike ther camp o' ther Bowens, an' doesn't hev no call ter glide in on 'em fer a visit, jist skute down ther bottom timber 'bout a mile below ther ford on ther north side ther drink, an' ye'll run inter a hoss-shoe bend."

"When yer gits thar, jist gi'n a owl-hoot on't, then wait two skips an' gi'n two more follerin' right speedy arter each other, an' I'm purty sartin a fust-class Red 'll show hisself. Hyer's a leetle antelope-horn what talks biz wi' thar Red. Fasten hit ter yer belt an' he'll know ye're a pard o' mine. Yer better git him ter go 'long o' yer, fer things is strange thet-a-way, an' he's thet smartest, whitest Red I ever see'd, 'ceptin' Raven, Turtle, an' Rattlesnake, ther three Tonkaways what I parded with, an' does now; all 'cept Raven, who air gone on ther long dark trail. This hyer Injun air a Waco, an' his cog' air Wild Wolf."

Passing the antelope-horn to Adler, Big Foot added:

"Does yer know ther squar' way outen San Antone? An' come to think, whar's yer critter?"

"At Whittle's stable. I made inquiries before I met you, and I can find my way out of town, and to the ford of the Rio Medina. I am a thousand times obliged to you for thinking of that Indian. He may be of great use to me."

"All serene, pard. Git yer animile, an' ride up hyer, an' we-'uns 'll guide yer on ther start."

George Adler withdrew, soon returning mounted and equipped for the trail, and walked his horse along the street, one of the scouts on either side of him. In this way he crossed the Plaza, and in a very short time reached the mesquite where the body of Miguel Rios swayed slowly in the moonlight. Turning the corner of the street, which led past the old Cock Pit toward the Mission, Big Foot laid his hand on the bridle rein, and brought the horse to a halt. Then he said:

"Thar, pard George, yer now hes a purty direct course. Keep ter ther trail, an' ye're all O. K. Take keer o' yerself, an' we'll jine yer ter-morrer night, I reckon. We'll find yer without yer leavin' ary sign. Yer kin bet we air both squar', pard."

"I know it, and thank you both. I shall never forget your kindness, and I am proud of your friendship. A bad start is a good ending, according to my way of thinking, and I hope I am right this time. Shake, pard, and good-night."

"Hyar's my paw, pard George," said Post Oak Bill, "an' hit's your ter command without a struggle. I hopes yer'll strike ther Bowen fit-out O. K. Keep a stiff eyelid, an' w'ar yer sticker in front, handy ter jerk fer that yaller cuss; fer he's es full o' concentrated cussedness es a terrantaler air o' p'ison. So long, pard!"

"Adios," said Adler, cheerily; and then, driving spurs, he galloped down the street toward the mesquite-bordered wagon road that led to the ford of the Rio Medina.

"Wa-al, I'll sw'ar ter Moses!" burst out the giant scout. "I hev never see'd a caliker-kivered human what 'peared ter take a tight grip from ther start on my hull bizness 'natomy, es thet Angel did what writ that letter ter me ter-day; though I hain't slung a word with her, an' now I'm jist ther wu'st set-up ole mustang-straddler that ever chawed rusty bacon, 'bout this yere George. He's straight up and down, plum squar', es I air a bug-eatin' Digger. What yer thinks, pard Bill? Ain't thet kerrect, an' 'bout ther solid way ter set him down?"

"Pard, yer hes chalked him on the right spot, an' I air surprised 'bout how he glided inter a pardship 'long o' we-'uns. But I ain't any ways fear'd o' his turnin' out anythin' 'cept a solid XXX white man. Howsomever, let us hump ourselves down creek ter our nags, an' roll up in our blankets fer repose. Thar's a hefty biz ahead, er I air a buck Piute."

"Strike out, pard; I'm with yer. But I doesn't think I'll lay down long. Somethin' air a-botherin' my brain-box. I air a-bettin' I'll straddle my critter an' skute toward ther Medina afore an hour."

The two scouts glided along the bank of the San Antonio river, through the fig bushes toward the pecan-bordered margin below the Alamo City.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE SCORES ONE.

WHEN George Adler had passed the old Cock Pit, he found himself still in a much traveled road, but bordered by a dense chaparral, and he became plunged in a maze of thought in regard to the appearance of Frank Ames and his three friends in San Antonio.

Not that their object was any mystery to him, for he knew that Frank was determined to win the hand of Belle Bowen by fair means or foul, and, from the fact that the old colonel had departed from the Trinity secretly, it was plain that the latter was not in favor of an alliance with the last of the Ames family. The mystery of the affair was, that he himself had known of the intended departure and proposed route, having been informed by Belle, who did not herself know, at their last interview, when the start was to be made.

He had come, by the most direct road, to San Antonio, and had left Frank Ames on the Trinity; but, lo and behold, the latter had

Big Foot Wallace.

arrived in the Alamo City on the same day as himself, and a few hours earlier!

There were but two reasonable conclusions in explanation. Either Frank Ames had posted a spy in the magnolia grove when Belle and himself had met the last time on the Trinity, or else he had in some manner been informed of the departure of Colonel Bowen and his daughter, and had sent an emissary to follow, and inform him of the course taken by them. He then, having purchased the best horses to be had, felt that he could easily overtake the loaded wagons.

If this was the case—and it was the most plausible explanation of the presence of Ames—the last must also have been informed by the same spy, that he, Adler, was following the Bowens. From this he came to the conclusion that Frank must now be aware of his presence in San Antonio, and doubtless had made inquiries concerning him at the Menger and other public places. He congratulated himself now, that he had not made known his name or object to any one except the two scouts, and also felt greatly rejoiced that he had secured those faithful men on his side. So far, it was promising.

But all this trouble and danger to his betrothed would have been avoided, had he not been robbed of his rights. Had not Duncan Dudley absconded with his father's money, he would have been in a position to marry Belle without stopping to ask the consent of any one; and he would have done so, as soon as he discovered that she was being persecuted by the worthless young scamp, if he had anything like a home to offer her.

However, small as was his fortune, in comparison with what it had formerly been, and to that of Belle, he determined to make her his own at the first opportunity. He felt the most intense contempt for Frank Ames, and for the young men whom the latter had by some means induced to accompany him; all of them being well known to him by sight and reputation, which was none of the best. He determined however, to dismiss all thought of them from his mind, as unworthy of consideration.

Pondering upon the singular conduct of Colonel Bowen, George began to reason that Belle could not be prized by her step-father as the apple of his eye, and he grew suspicious, for the first time, that she was being conveyed into these scenes of danger for the purpose of getting her murdered by savages or bandits, in order to get possession of her fortune.

But this, in the face of the strong attachment that the colonel had never striven to conceal, though masking all other emotions behind a stern air and manner, was unreasonable. Nor was it natural to suppose that the latter and Frank Ames had any friendly compact in regard to the disposal of Belle's hand.

Take it all in all, the departure to the frontier, the following of young Ames, and the encounter with the Mestizo, all were puzzles which George strove in vain to unravel; for, although he had not spoken of it to the scouts, he could not banish from his mind the thought that the half-breed had been set upon his track to assassinate him. There was no reason for the dastardly wretch to plant himself in his path in the way he did, for Adler was a stranger and had never seen him before; besides there was an unmistakable expression in the eyes of the lurking spy that spoke of pleasure and triumph, as the latter attacked him. He believed this fully, and also that Frank Ames was the man who was having him shadowed.

The moon now shone brightly in the heavens, and as his horse had been in a gallop since leaving town, he had gone some two-thirds of the distance between it and the Rio Medina, having left the mesquites, and was now riding across the bald open prairie.

Soon the dark ribbon of timber that marked the course of the river ahead was in plain view; a broad belt of chaparral being of sufficient height to shield him and his horse in their approach to the stream.

Deeming it imprudent to keep the traveled road, George guided his horse into the mesquites, among the winding trails toward the Medina, and soon after he rode beneath the moss-draped trees of the river-bottom. Here and there an arrow of moonlight shot down through the foliage, enabling him to note the lay of the land. Up toward the ford he slowly guided his horse, until he arrived at the margin of the timber near the same, but he could discover no signs of a camp. Across the river the bank was some thirty feet higher than the

north side upon which he stood, consequently had there been fires or wagons just over the stream from him he could not have seen them. Surprised that Colonel Bowen had not encamped in so favorable a spot, George then thought of the Indian, and turned his horse down the stream. Reaching, as near as he could judge, a point some two miles from the ford, he gave the signal as directed. Scarcely had the last hoot left his lips when there came to his ears a single guttural expression, which sounded directly behind him:

"Waugh!"

His horse gave a snort, and whirling in his tracks, faced the point of alarm.

As the young man gazed forward, he saw before him, his arms folded over his broad breast, his head proudly poised, and standing as straight as a forest pine, a warrior in every sense of the word.

As noble a specimen of physical manhood as George Adler had ever seen, had seemingly been conjured up from the ground by the signal he had given. The head of the brave was crowned with a fillet of eagle-feathers, and he was naked to the waist. Below this he had fancifully decorated buckskin leggins, and moccasins with thick buffalo-skin soles. In a beaded belt was thrust a long scalping-knife, and a Colt's revolver, while from a strap which hung over his shoulders was suspended a bullet-pouch and paint-bag. This was Wild Wolf, the Waco.

The eyes of the two men met in a long, unflinching gaze, during which not a word was spoken; then George sprung from his horse, and passing the bit of antelope horn, upon which were engraved some rude characters, to the Indian, he stood waiting for the latter to speak.

Only for an instant did the red-man glance at the horn; then, making a step forward, he caught the hand of George Adler, and placed it upon his breast, in token of friendship and brotherhood, saying:

"Friend of Big Foot Wallace is friend of Wild Wolf. My white brother is welcome. Come. The lodge of the Waco chief is open. His tongue is not forked."

"Thanks, Wild Wolf. I am on the trail, but I will halt and rest a little with you."

"Tie mustang here. Want eat grass. Mebbe so will fast when sun come."

"Yes, my friend; I presume I may have occasion to ride fast and long for the next few days. But how do you come to know of it?"

"Big Foot, be always on war-path. Friends on war-path. Wild Wolf on war-path all time. Bad white men in woods. Apaches, Comanches, Kioway, all got on war-paint. Heap much fight. Heap much scalp."

"Do you go on the war-path alone, my red friend?"

"No. Got warriors up river. Hide in thick trees. Wild Wolf ride down Medina. See Big Foot come."

"Big Foot will be here to-morrow," said George.

"Good. Come in bush. No talk where moon shines. Rifles shoot in day. Rifles shoot in night, all same on war-path."

George Adler secured his horse to a sapling, and followed the Indian into the timber. They entered a dense thicket of wild plums, within which was a clear space, circular in form, and some thirty feet in diameter. In the middle of this well-guarded opening was a lodge made from the reeds of the river; while in front of the dwelling was a platform made in the same manner. Upon this was a pair of buffalo-robies, the skin side strangely ornamented in vermilion. Over the door of the lodge was hung another robe, indicating that other than Wild Wolf were dwellers there, but the latter threw aside a robe on the platform.

"Let my white brother rest," he said, as he did so. "He shall have meat. The rifle of Wild Wolf shoots straight, and the deer run fast when they see the Waco chief."

He then brought from a smoldering fire broiled venison and parched corn upon a large green leaf, and placed the same before his guest, and the latter partook of the simple meal with an appetite born of his twelve-mile ride over the plain. This done, he produced his tobacco-pouch and passed it to the Indian, who with a grunt of satisfaction filled his pipe, and igniting it, began to smoke with great gusto.

For ten minutes not a word was spoken, although George was boiling over with im-

patience to learn something in regard to the camp of the Bowens.

"Wild Wolf," he began at last, "have you seen two wagons that came from San Antonio this evening?"

"One wagon got so many horses," holding up two fingers of his right hand, and then four of his left, adding, "and one wagon so many mules?"

"Yes," said the young man; "that is the party I am after."

"Old man, white hair. Young squaw, face like daughter of Great Spirit?" the Waco chief inquired further.

"Yes, yes; those are they. Where are they camped?"

Without a word Wild Wolf pointed directly across the river.

"Can I reach them without swimming across?"

"Climb in tree. Cross on branch to branch other side."

"Good! I must go and see where and how they are located. I shall want to see them start off in the morning also; or I may want to go ahead of them. Where will they be likely to encamp to-morrow night?"

"Mebbe so go to San Miguel. Mebbe so go long ride to Frio."

"Will my red friend cross the river with me?"

"Wild Wolf will go where white brother say. He is friend of great scout of Texas. It is well. Come!"

George followed the Waco along winding paths, and soon the ripple of waters broke on his ear. The next moment the ink-like surface of the Medina was at his feet, here and there relieved by a patch of silver, and by bars of moonlight that shot through the foliage of the grand archway of limbs far above.

The Indian sprung nimbly into the branches of a tree, George following him, until they reached a dizzy height where the limbs from either side twined together.

Over the river in this way they passed; descended, and stood on the south side of the Rio Medina. All was silent, except the hoot of owl, or bark of coyote.

"Come," said Wild Wolf, in a whisper.

Once again the young man followed on the heels of the Waco; this time up-stream, and along the bank, it being about ten feet above the water. Not more than a hundred yards had been gone over when the Waco halted, and pointing ahead of them, said:

"There, camp. Two wagon. White hair chief. Squaw, face like rose of prairie. My white brother go see. Wild Wolf stay here. Want Waco chief, hoot like owl."

With these words the Indian seated himself in the dense shade, lit his pipe and puffed with an air that showed he was confident there existed no necessity for caution in that section. George went on as the Waco had directed him, but had advanced some distance before he could distinguish the wagons and fires.

It was plain to our young friend, as he proceeded, that the colonel had not stationed a guard, and that the camp was open to the inspection of any one who might be passing in the vicinity. He cast longing glances toward the Dearborn, and wished, from the inmost recesses of his heart, that he could go boldly into the camp, and speak with his soul's idol; but he knew that such a course would raise a storm from Colonel Bowen which would be hard to bear, and not only that, but it would doubtless be of great injury to his cause in the future.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, he crawled forward, resolved that he would reach the Dearborn and get speech with Belle, if possible; but he had not gone thirty paces when, right in front of him, he beheld the form of a man crawling, like himself on hands and knees.

There was no retreat, for both were in a cattle trail, narrow, and bordered with bushes, which, if either entered, would betray his presence to the other.

Between the two men there was a moonlit space, and this was not five feet from where George had halted in his surprise. Not until within this patch of moonlight, did the stranger, who was evidently a spy, discover George Adler. As he did so, the latter saw distinctly the swollen and repulsive face of the Mestizo, his eyes glaring with malignant hatred and a look, at the same time, of intense exultation.

Only for a moment did the two strangely met human beings gaze at each other. The next the half-breed sprung forward like a panther,

directly upon the enemy before him, who was so startled and amazed at the unaccountable and mysterious appearance of the Mestizo at such a time and place that he was rendered, for the time being, almost helpless, and had not even time to draw his weapon before the cowardly savage had clutched him.

As the half-breed sprung forward, George arose to his feet and grasped the knife-hand of his would-be murderer on the instant; then both, with arms and legs at times interlocked, writhed and staggered about among the thick bushes, each making superhuman efforts to throw the other to the earth; their muscles strained to the very utmost tension, while the swollen face, bloodshot eyes, and clinched teeth of the Mestizo brought close to the young man's face, caused him to shudder with all the aversion and dread that one feels when just escaping the spring of a rattlesnake.

Not more than a minute did the two men struggle together on the bank of the river; for recovering him on a sudden, George Adler pressed the half-breed forward with irresistible force, the heel of the latter striking a root, which caused him to lose his balance, and both the combatants fell headlong, crashing through the dense undergrowth that bordered the bank, into the Rio Medina, striking the waters with a sounding splash, and then disappearing beneath the inky surface.

CHAPTER VII.

WILD WOLF.

STILL retaining his grip about the right wrist of the Mestizo, George Adler, as they sunk together beneath the waters of the Medina, released his left hand by a quick jerk from the grasp of the half-breed, and clutched him by the throat, causing him to writhe and contort in, apparently, the spasms of death.

When he ceased his struggles, George released himself, and quickly swam to the bank, where, climbing up it, he was confronted by Wild Wolf, who stood silent in the moonlight, his stoical face showing naught of the thoughts that ruled his brain.

That the slight commotion occasioned by the struggle with the Mestizo, had caused an alarm in the camp of Colonel Bowen, was evident; for a hum of voices reached the ears of George and the Waco, and an increased light showed that the fires had been replenished.

The Indian was the first to speak.

"My white brother is not a beaver, that he should swim in the river. Waters of Medina show no trail. Make heap noise. Bad on war-path."

"Wild Wolf talks good sense," said the young man in reply; "but I was forced into the river. An enemy was in my path. He came upon me so quick that I had no time to draw my knife, and we fell in the water while trying to get the advantage of each other. But I believe I choked his life out."

"Whc enemy—white, red, black, yellow?"

"Well, you have me there, chief; for he is neither one nor the other. He's a mixture—a half-breed."

"Mestizo, mebbe so? Heap bad man."

"Yes; I believe that is what Post Oak Bill called him."

"How Post Oak Bill see to Medina? How he speak to my white brother over heap big plain?"

"Well, I ought to have explained that. This same Mestizo tried to knife me in San Antonio, and I gave him then a blow with my fist between the eyes that laid him out senseless for some little time."

"Mexican never forget blow with hand. Indian never forget blow with hand. Worse than cut with knife."

"You may be right—I presume you are—but that Mexican is past liking or disliking it now."

At this moment a loud and piercing yell shot up the vast natural archway of towering trees.

George Adler looked into the face of the Waco, inquiringly.

"My white brother go on first war-path?"

"Yes, Wild Wolf, this is my first. But what does that terrible cry mean, from down the stream?"

"My white brother forget? Mestizo no die easy."

"You don't mean to say that the half-breed gave that yell?"

"It was the war-cry of the Mestizo. He is filled with the thirst for blood. My white brother must keep eyes open."

"I am not afraid of him. He has got off with his life this time. The next, I'll make a sure thing of it."

"He has seen the camp of my white brother's friends."

The Waco turned away, and George followed him across the river to the secret opening, where he found a fire blazing, and a young and very pretty squaw cooking venison at the same.

As the two entered the open space she arose quickly to an erect position, and looked toward them.

"Warnona is the squaw of Wild Wolf, the Rose of the Wacos," said the chief by way of introduction. "My white brother is the friend of the Great Scout of Texas."

"The friend of the Chief of the Post Oaks is welcome."

Seating himself by the fire, George Adler began to watch with great interest, the movements of these children of nature. Graceful as a fawn, Warnona glided here and there, occasionally casting a glance of mingled love and pride at her handsome savage lord.

Not long had George been seated in this position, when once again the same unearthly shriek shot through the timber, from the same point to all seeming, from which he had left the river.

The Indian merely glanced upward an instant, and then looked as though the sound was unworthy of notice.

"Has a young panther lost its mother?" asked Warnona.

"Wild Wolf is ashamed of his squaw," was the reply. "She knows not the bark of a coyote from the song of a bird."

"The sounds of the night are strange to Warnona," she said. "She has been but three moons from the lodge of her mother."

"Wild Wolf's words were hard toward the Rose of the Wacos," said the chief. "It is the cry of a Mestizo, whose knife is in his hand, and whose eyes look for the trail of our white brother. Wild Wolf must put on war-paint. His blood grows hot."

"Let him come," said the young squaw. "His death-yell will sound sweeter to Warnona than the song of birds. The enemy of the white chief is the enemy of the Wacos."

"The words of Warnona are good," replied Wild Wolf."

But while George is drying himself by the fire, and the Waco is putting on his war-paint, let us look after the Mestizo. While beneath the surface of the water, the cunning half-breed had sense enough left to know that there was but one chance for his life; and that was to simulate death. This he at once did, though at the time he was nearer dead than alive.

As soon as he was released, therefore, he whirled upon his back, and allowed himself to float down the stream, with nothing but his face above the water.

When he decided in his mind that he could climb the bank without being observed by his hated enemy, he swam silently to the shore, and there lay, panting and exhausted, hissing out curses, not loud but deep and bitter at having again been foiled by the young Texan. Then it was that, an idea suddenly occurring to him, he gave full vent to his feelings in the yell which first startled George.

Then he crawled along the bank of the river in the direction of the camp of Colonel Bowen, giving utterance as he did so to another shrill unearthly shriek.

Upon reaching a position where he had a view of the camp, the Mestizo rolled on the earth in fiendish glee then sprung erect, and darted like an arrow up the river for a couple of rifle shots. There he entered a dense thicket where stood a wiry mustang, the bridle of the same hanging from the horn of the saddle. Quickly loosening an extra lariat from the cantle, he rushed in wild bounds toward the river, over which he made his way in the same manner that Wild Wolf and George Adler had done.

Down a tree on the north bank he slid, and then ran on through the bottom timber to the opening at the bend where George had met the Waco, and where the horse of the former was still grazing. The animal threw up its head and snorted in alarm, which caused the half-breed to bound back into the bushes with a vile oath upon his lips.

He next examined the ground until he came upon a well-beaten path which led toward the ford, and by which he knew from the fresh prints of the hoofs that George Adler must

have found his way down to the bend. Choosing a spot where the path led through a mass of undergrowth, the Mestizo climbed a tree at one side, and secured the end of the lariat to a large limb some ten feet from the ground; then, spreading the noose in the other end he adjusted it loosely on the bushes, it being about the right distance from the earth to allow of a horse passing under it. Thus, a man riding along the path would be caught in the noose; and, if his horse should be moving quickly, would stand a chance of having his neck broken by its tightening suddenly and jerking him from the back of the animal. The faster the horse went, the less chance there would be of the rider's escaping with his life.

The half-breed now sneaked away in the dark shades, a fiendish laugh bursting from his lips.

Wild Wolf, having at length completed his war-stripes, rose again to his feet, and exclaimed:

"Gun loaded. Chief woke up. Council-fire gone out. Wild Wolf ready for Big Foot. The war-path is open."

Thus spoke the Waco chief. Then he inquired:

"Why does the white-haired chief take young squaw with cheeks like prairie rose where Apache war-cry will make her face white as the lily?"

"I cannot tell you why, my red friend. It is a mystery to me. He is very foolish, I think."

"My white brother has a straight tongue. White Hair is a fool. His scalp will hang on an Apache lance. I have spoken. Lies build not their nests on my tongue."

"I would like to ask you one question," said George:

"Let my white brother speak."

"Why was it that the Mestizo screamed, when he must have known that it was so dangerous?"

"He yell, then crawl fast in bushes. Watch for enemy. He want scare White Hair from camp."

"Do you think that Colonel Bowen will move camp?"

"White Hair gone. Squaw gone. Wagons gone."

"How do you know this, chief?" demanded George.

"Wild Wolf has ears," was the brief but significant reply.

"And I am not deaf, but I heard no sounds that would indicate a departure of the wagons."

"Hear my white brother and Mestizo fall in river. Hear Mestizo yell. Mebbe so think Apaches come. Get scare. Go off in dark. Think wagons make no noise on grass, but Wild Wolf's ears are open. Hear little bird sing 'way off in tree. Ask Warnona."

"Warnona has heard the wagons," said the squaw.

George Adler sprung toward the entrance of the opening.

"Where go?" asked the chief, with some show of anger.

"To mount my horse," replied George, "and cross the ford, to see if the wagons are in sight on the plain."

"No see wagons. Plenty mesquite bush. My white brother lose scalp. Mestizo hide in dark bushes. Wild Wolf is not a fool. Bad white men on Frio. Give gold to Mestizo. Send wagons in night."

The young man waited to hear no more. He felt that the Waco spoke the truth, and that Belle and the colonel were in great danger. Rushing in frantic haste to his horse, he mounted and spurred up the stream toward the ford in the way that he came.

As he urged his horse at speed along the narrow trail, he approached the thicket in which the deadly noose awaited him; but a sneaking coyote darting across the path caused the steed to spring upward, and the lariat intended for the rider encircled the neck of the beast. Thus choked, the animal fell to the earth, hurling Adler far into the midst of the timber, where, his head striking the trunk of a tree, he lay senseless. This was the Mestizo's opportunity, and he improved it. Springing astride of his fallen foe, he raised his cuchillo in the air, the long blade glittering in the moonlight. The snake-like eyes of the half-breed shone like those of a basilisk, as he gloated over his helpless victim, trembling all the while with the intensity of his insane delight. At that moment, so critical, the proud

form of the Waco chief appeared in the trail by the side of the struggling horse.

Wild Wolf, without a pause, raised his rifle to his shoulder, and the sharp report sounded on the instant, quickly awakening a thousand echoes of the night, and rolling along the natural archway to the ford. It was none too soon.

The uplifted hand of the murderous Mestizo was shattered by the bullet of the Waco, the knife flew through the air, and with a cry of agony and terror the half breed rushed away from his prostrate foe and disappeared among the shadows.

The Indian bounded forward, cut the lasso clear from the half-dead horse, and then, after reloading his rifle, began examining his white friend. Finding that Adler was not injured, except by having been brought into such sharp collision with the tree, which had bruised and stunned him, Wild Wolf deliberately seated himself upon some deadwood, ignited his pipe, and placidly puffed away as if nothing had occurred to interrupt the still, deep current of his thoughts.

CHAPTER VIII.

DREAD SCENES OF NIGHT.

BELLE BOWEN had passed from childhood to the age of nineteen without having known any great trouble, except the sudden departure of her brother from his home. Had she known where Edward was, she would have written, urging him to return, as it had turned out that Frank Adler was but slightly injured in their encounter. As time went by, however, she began to reason that Edward was quite able to take care of himself, and she pictured him in her mind as a wealthy and honored member of society, and looked forward to the pleasure of some day meeting him and being proud of him.

Not remembering anything of her own father, and having been loved and cherished so devotedly by Colonel Bowen, she had as deep an affection for him as if he had been in reality her parent. That some great grief hung over him, she well knew; but when she had questioned him in regard to it, he had always turned abruptly away. As to the demand of Frank Ames for her hand in marriage, she knew nothing; although she had been persecuted beyond measure by his unwelcome attentions, which were the most persistently urged when, as was often the case, the young man was intoxicated.

Had Belle known that the man whom she called father had seen and heard all that had passed between her and Frank Ames at their last interview, and that it was this that caused him to remove at once from the Rio Trinity, she would have been not only puzzled but indignant that the colonel should allow himself to be driven from his home for so trivial a cause, and by so worthless a person. But there was much that she did not know.

For some time past Belle had noticed that her father was more morose and absent-minded than ever, and she would not have wondered at it had she known of the demands made upon him by Frank Ames. No other man in the world could have spoken to the old colonel in such a manner, without being called to face the muzzle of a revolver; but the young man so much resembled his father, Captain Jack Ames, that Colonel Bowen could scarce look him in the face without a shudder. In fact the spirit of the man whom he had killed seemed to haunt him day and night, and to gaze into his very soul from the eyes of the dead man's son. He felt that Frank must know of that murder in the Trinity bottom-timber, and that he was at any time and place liable to accuse him of his father's death. With this dread before him, the colonel had hastened his departure for the wilds of Western Texas.

Until their arrival in San Antonio, Belle had greatly enjoyed the journey; at times riding in the Dearborn and at others galloping like the wind upon a favorite pony over the prairies, in the advance of the wagons. When, however, she had been insulted by the Mexican on the plaza, and afterward saw, as they rode along in the rear of the crowd, her insulter shot and then hung to the mesquite, the young girl began to realize something of the dangers by which she was surrounded. The rough-garbed men of many nationalities greatly impressed her. She witnessed the shooting of Miguel Rios, and plainly saw the face of the man who shot him. But to all her entreaties to her father to return, he turned a deaf ear,

assuring her that they would soon reach a place that was quiet and peaceful, where man had not marred the handiwork of nature, and where she would enjoy life to the full, among unfading flowers and the ceaseless song of birds. He failed, however, to instill any of the confidence that he felt into her mind. She had forebodings in spite of it, though she understood them not. But she felt that George Adler would follow and protect her, and she began to have a hope that the scout Wallace would make it his business to come toward the Frio, and perhaps induce the colonel to settle nearer to San Antonio.

When the wagons reached the Rio Medina, and were drawn through the clear rushing waters at the ford, just as the sun sunk in the west through the branches of the giant trees bedecked with flowering vines, and ten thousand hanging festoons of silvery Spanish moss, then Belle Bowen was in raptures, and even the old colonel smiled at her enthusiasm, pleased that his prophecy was already verified. Truly everything looked brighter already.

"Papa," exclaimed Belle, as she ran into the camp from a visit to the river, "it is really delightful here. Please, let us not go any further away from San Antonio. There can be no danger here from Indians, and I am sure land must be as cheap here as on the Rio Frio."

"This land is all owned by those who will not sell," said Colonel Bowen. "But wait until you see the Frio, my dear, and I doubt not you will be better pleased."

"But there is danger there, papa; and our lives are to be considered. We ought to think more of that."

"A fig for danger!" said the colonel, contemptuously. "Those Indian stories are only idle tales gotten up by the stock raisers, who wish to prevent any one from settling on their extensive free ranges; besides, we can erect a block-house that will be as strong as a fortress. Don't worry me, Belle, with your groundless fears. I feel relieved to get away from the Trinity, and it is for your sake as much as my own."

When darkness settled down upon the earth, and all were asleep, Belle, who had made herself a couch in the Dearborn, could not close her eyes, for the events of the past day had greatly excited her. The hideous face of the Mexican, as he hung from the mesquite, was constantly before her, and she could not banish the scene from her mind. Besides this, the thoughts of George Adler, and also of Big Foot Wallace, that were flitting through her brain, made her at last fancy that she saw the noted scout and her lover dancing gleefully with the Mexican who had been hung, and the one who had fired the fatal shot.

These pictures, conjured up by the occurrences of the day, so impressed her, that she sprang to a sitting posture, and rubbed her eyes, determining that she would not again try to court sleep. As she looked out from the rear of the Dearborn toward the river, she was startled by the sight of a man crawling upon his hands and knees in the moonlight. To her disordered imagination he bore a striking resemblance to the Mexican she had seen hanging from the mesquite; and, as he disappeared among the bushes, she was seized with an uncontrollable desire to watch him—a terrible fascination which she could not resist, although she was conscious of the great danger of discovery.

Speechless with a nameless dread, Belle Bowen glided toward the river, and to her horror discovered another human form, also upon hands and knees, approaching the first. Although she could not see his face, she knew by his movements that he was not aware of the presence of the first; and, not only this, but felt sure that he was some one whom she knew. But before she had time to collect her thoughts the two men were engaged in a death-struggle, in which they staggered and stumbled toward the river. Belle strove to cry out, but her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth; and when, for an instant, an arrow of moonlight shot across, and revealed the face of the man she most loved, as the assassin's knife glittered above his breast, and both he and his antagonist fell with a sounding splash into the river, the maiden sunk senseless to the sward, without the strength to cry aloud.

How long she lay thus Belle knew not; but when she revived she regretted that she had not remained so; for to the horror of the past was added the almost certainty that her lover could not have escaped with life. Faint and

weak with dread and terror, the young girl stood there alone in the darkness of the thicket, giddily and swaying with a deathlike faintness; she at last became aware of a singular murmuring sound proceeding from a point but a little further down the river. The same fascination which had led her to leave the camp, and which she could not for her life resist, caused her to steal toward the point whence the peculiar noise came. She had gone but a short distance amid the bushes, when another sight of terror met her gaze. Was she becoming insane? Could it be that she was only dreaming that such strange scenes were presented to her view, or her mind's eye, she could not decide which? Belle Bowen had never seen an Indian; but there stood one, in full war-paint, his eagle-feathers flaunting in the moonlight and his rifle grasped in his hand.

"Merciful Heaven!"

In a hoarse whisper of prayer and dread, these words burst from poor Belle's lips; but, as the form and face of the Waco were photographed on her brain, she little thought that this paint-daubed savage would, in the time to come, save her from a worse fate than death. She only knew that he was an Indian; and with that knowledge was conjured up all the savage cruelty of his people of which she had read.

With her eyes fixed upon the Waco for a moment, Belle at length became conscious that he was addressing some one, and glancing downward, she discovered another human form recumbent upon the earth. That this was a captive, bound and ready to be taken to torture, she felt sure; but she was soon undeceived, by seeing the man arise and walk down the bank in company with the Indian. Looking upward next, she caught sight of a white face afar up among the branches, where the moon shone clear—a face that was turned toward the camp she had left, the one face to her in the world—that of George Adler!

She clutched the sapling by her side with both her delicate hands, and strove again to cry out; but the name, George, died away in a gurgling whisper, and the next moment a huge black bear came waddling up the cattle trail, its red tongue lolling outward, and as it tossed its head, displaying its horrible teeth, while it snuffed the air on either side.

Back to the camp as if the fiends were in pursuit went Belle Bowen—back to where the old colonel lay wrapped in his blanket and sleeping soundly—and there she fell by his side, insensible.

Startled from his slumbers, Colonel Bowen sprung up, glanced at the prostrate form of his daughter, and swept the surrounding wood with a piercing gaze. There were no trees between them and the water, nothing except clumps of bushes, and the ground beyond was clearly illuminated. As the colonel's eyes roved around, he saw amid the branches on the north side of the river the painted face of an Indian; for, at this moment, Wild Wolf was peering downward to ascertain if the form of the Mestizo was in view, for he doubted very much if the latter had been killed by George Adler.

Alarmed at the sight, Colonel Bowen was at first unable to comprehend whether he was asleep or awake; but the huge bear now coming up with his savage growl, quickly decided the matter. There was no time for preparation. The colonel's pistols were under his saddle, which he had used as a pillow. Luckily his bowie was in his belt, so placing Belle hastily out of harm's way on the sward, he grasped a heavy woolen blanket and tossing it over the head of the bear, as the latter arose on its hinder legs, he drove the knife to the hilt in the brute's side, just back of the shoulder blade. Out came the steel, and again and again was it plunged into the vitals of the bear—the animal, blinded by the blanket, being unable to injure his assailant. Soon seeing that the beast was mortally wounded, the colonel caught up his daughter in his arms, and hastening to the Dearborn, laid her upon the blankets inside. Panting with exertion, he stood for a moment, watching the death-struggles of the bear, which had torn the blanket to shreds; then, he procured some water, and bathed Belle's head, unable to comprehend why it was that she had left her couch in the first place, and also puzzled by the unexpected sight of a war-painted Indian so near to San Antonio.

Belle Bowen presently opened her eyes, moaned, and a convulsive shudder shook her frame; but when she recognized her father,

and realized that she was again in the Dearborn, she drew a sigh of relief, and raising herself on her elbow, asked in a whisper:

"Father, have you seen a bear?"

"Yes, my child; but the beast is harmless now. I have killed him. Why did you leave the Dearborn?"

Disregarding the question, Belle asked another, in a hesitating manner, as if she feared to be ridiculed:

"Papa, tell me, have you seen an Indian?"

"Yes; but, in the name of wonder, where did you see him?"

The colonel was filled with amazement and regret.

"Please don't ask me, papa; but, for my sake, do hitch up quietly, and let us leave this horrible camp. Let us go anywhere—anywhere, so that we leave this dreadful spot. Every thicket is full of terrible things."

At this instant, piercing shrieks sounded from down the river—sounds like those made by a panther in agony.

"It shall be as you say, my dear," agreed the colonel. "Don't be afraid, Belle; there is nothing that can work you harm." So saying, and arousing the negroes, he ordered them to hitch up without noise; and, in a little time the Dearborn with its precious freight, followed by the Conestoga, moved slowly and silently out from the timber of the Rio Medina, and then along, parallel with the same for some miles east, when Colonel Bowen ordered a turn, striking out in a southerly direction, over the plain toward the San Miguel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MUSTANG SNAKE.

WILD WOLF had not taken half a dozen whiffs at his pipe, when Warnona glided like a specter along the trail, and stood for a moment gazing at the senseless form of George Adler. Then the squaw spoke:

"Has knife of Mestizo found heart of our white brother?"

The Waco chief said not a word, but pointed toward a glittering object in the trail. Warnona stepped forward and picked up the cuchillo, and examined it.

"Mestizo's blade is not stained with the blood of our white brother. It is good. Warnona is not blind. Wild Wolf's bullet has left its mark. Mestizo's blood is on the handle of his own knife."

"Waugh!" was the satisfied exclamation of the Indian. "Warnona cooks the venison of a chief. Her eyes are sharp. Wild Wolf is not ashamed that she sweeps his lodge. The waters of the Medina will bring our white brother back from the dark lands."

Taking a gourd from the saddle of the still prostrate horse, Warnona darted toward the river, saying:

"Let Mestizo beware. A Waco squaw will send him on the long dark trail. A Waco squaw fears not a coward who crawls like a snake in the bushes, and sounds not his rattle before he jumps."

"Waugh!" repeated the chief in his pride, as he stood erect, and gazed for a moment after Warnona. He then stalked up to the horse, which lay with its eyes rolling in pain. Nine times out of ten the lasso trap would have broken a horse's neck, if the animal was going at a gallop; and, had the horse escaped the noose, and the same caught about the neck of the rider—as it certainly, but for the coyote, would have done in this case—it would have been instant death.

Wild Wolf caught the bridle, and drew the animal half over upon its knees. He then assisted it to rise, the poor horse groaning deeply as it regained its feet, shook itself, and stretched its wounded neck.

Just then Warnona reappeared upon the scene. With a gourd of water in her hand, she knelt upon the ground and drew the head of George Adler upon her knees, pouring the water over it, and between his parched lips.

With a groan, that seemed an echo of that given by his horse, George opened his eyes and looked into the face of Warnona, at first in surprise; but, as the trees and waving moss above caught his eye, and a side glance showed him his horse and the Waco chief, he recollects what had occurred, and with the assistance of the squaw staggered to his feet. Then, grasping the gourd, he leaned forward and poured the remaining contents over his fevered head.

"Thanks, Warnona," he said; "I shall not forget your kindness. You may have saved my life."

"My white brother was in the dark land," said the chief, who stood by the horse, with his arms folded.

"Your words describe my past condition to the letter, chief. I was launched there so suddenly, that for my life I can't tell what sent me. Hold, I do remember that a coyote crossed the trail, and frightened my horse. He must have stumbled and thrown me."

"Had coyote been on other side of Medina, my white brother would have gone to his fathers."

"What do you mean by that, Wild Wolf?"

"Come," said the chief, making a gesture for George to approach; and, as the latter reached his side, he pointed out the mark of the lasso about the neck of the horse. He then stepped forward, picked up and handed to George the severed noose.

"What in the name of wonder does this mean, chief?"

"Mestizo try catch my white brother with mustang snare."

"Well, I am amazed! He is more of a coward than I thought. Then he really did escape death in the river. I could have sworn I had choked the life out of his foul carcass. How did the coyote save me?"

"Coyote scare horse. Horse jump up and get head in lasso. Coyote no come, horse go straight on trail. Rope catch my white brother. Break neck."

"Look!" broke in Warnona, advancing with the knife; "when our white brother was in the dark land the knife of Mestizo was over his heart, but bullet from Wild Wolf's rifle send it in grass. See. Blood of bad man stain his own knife. Our white brother lives. Warnona is glad."

George took the knife and examined it, recognizing it as the one the half-breed had upon two occasions endeavored to sheathe in his breast. The mark of a bullet was now on the handle, and also fresh stains of blood.

The young man grasped the hand of the chief.

"Wild Wolf, you have saved my life. I shall remember this night as long my life lasts. You shall have the best rifle that is to be had in San Antonio, and Warnona shall have a pair of handsome red blankets."

"Wild Wolf wants no rifle," said the chief, somewhat angrily. "He fights not for guns and blankets. My white brother is the friend of Big Foot Wallace. The great scout of Texas, is the brother of Wild Wolf. It is enough. Talk no good on war-path."

George Adler wisely changed the subject, by asking if the chief thought his horse had been badly injured.

"Horse no good," said Wild Wolf very decidedly. "Eat grass on Medina one moon, then good go on trail."

"Where can I get another, chief? I must go over the river immediately, and see which way the trail points."

"What is my white brother's name? What Wild Wolf say when want call?"

"My name is George Adler, chief."

"Name no good. Wild Wolf say white brother's name, Water Warrior. Fight Mestizo in Medina. It is good. What Warnona say?"

"Water Warrior good name for our white brother."

"Good," said the Waco. "What say our white brother?"

"I should say that name would fit me to a dot. It is very appropriate. All right. Water Warrior want horse."

"Warnona will lead mustang here," said the chief, with a wave of his hand. "Wild Wolf want mustang. Water Warrior want mustang. War-path open. Squaw no good on trail. Warnona stay in lodge on Medina. Wild Wolf will come back. His belt will be heavy with scalps."

The young squaw glided down the river to obey the orders of the chief, the knife still clutched in her hand.

"You must think I am a fool, chief, not to have made a sure thing of that Mestizo, after being hand to hand with him twice; and then to allow him to set a trap for me with such success that he would have killed me, had you not come up when you did."

"Wild Wolf tell Water Warrior keep eye open. A Waco's eye like eagle, but no see rope at night. Wild Wolf no ride fast in bushes. Ride slow. Look sharp!"

"Well, I reckon I have learned something in the last few hours; and the next time I get a chance at that half-breed I'll put a ball

through his head. He seems to bear a charmed life. Why did you spare him, chief? Why did you not shoot him dead?"

"No want kill yet. War-path no good when no enemy. Want Water Warrior learn much heap on trail. Mestizo learn my white brother. Keep eyes open. Keep hand on knife. Keep rifle ready."

"Thanks, very much. But I don't care to have my heart carved by my teacher. You must excuse me, but I must kill that Mestizo the first chance I get."

"Want save for torture," explained the Waco. "No hurt Water Warrior now. No fire rifle. No hold knife. Wild Wolf shoot fingers off. No good now on war-path."

"The villain must be furious with those fingers shot away. Besides it may kill him this hot weather."

"Wild Wolf say Mestizo no die easy. Cut off big piece tail of snake when sun come. Snake he crawl over ground, swallow young prairie dog before sun say good-by."

"I believe you are right, chief. The half-breed is more like a snake than a human, and it wouldn't surprise me to see him throw a lasso, or use a knife skillfully with his left hand."

As George ceased speaking, the prolonged howl of a black wolf sounded from the direction of the ford, and the Waco whirled about, his nostrils distorted like those of a bloodied race-horse at the starting line, his black eyes glittering and glaring into the darkness, his sinewy form bent forward, and his hand clutching the hilt of his scalping-knife, as if the war-whoop of a foe had cut the night air.

Only for an instant stood the chief thus. The next, and the peculiar cry of the chaparral cock rolled rapidly over his lips, and then the howl of the black wolf once more sounded, as if in answer.

George Adler stood, with open mouth, gazing in mingled wonder and inquiry, from Wild Wolf into the dark shades along the bank of the river.

Again the Waco chief bent forward, listening intently, as did his white friend, and soon the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard, coming down the beaten trail, mingled with the swish of branches and the labored panting of the steed, which indicated a long and wearied gallop. The next moment an Indian in full war paint, mounted upon a foam flecked mustang, bounded into the small clear space in which the listeners stood, bringing his steed to a sudden halt by a quick and hard jerk of the jaw-strap, the animal's fore-feet pawing the air just in front of the Waco chief, its tail sweeping the sword.

"Black Bear is welcome," exclaimed White Wolf. "Do buzzards fly low? Are coyotes thick between Medina and Big River—(Rio Grande)—that a Waco warrior rides at night to find his chief?"

Black Bear cast a questioning look toward Adler.

"Water Warrior friend of Wacos," explained the chief. "He brother great scout, Big Foot Wallace."

The new arrival sprung from his steed to the ground, grasping the proffered hand of the young man, and pressing the same to his painted breast, saying:

"Water Warrior friend of great Texas scout. Friend of Wild Wolf. He friend of Black Bear. It is well."

Then turning, he made answer to the chief:

"Buzzards fly low. Coyotes thick. Black wolves howl on prairie, for Comanches on war-path. Braves from Big Plains make many camps. Ride fast toward Big Water. Kill heap horses. Kill heap long-horns. Mebbe so kill heap white men, squaws, papooses, before moon grow small."

"Who chief?" inquired Wild Wolf.

"Rolling Thunder," was the reply.

"How many braves?"

Black Bear opened and closed his hand, outstretching his fingers and thumbs six times, thus indicating that there were sixty Comanche braves.

"How many my braves hunt mustangs on Nueces?"

"All in camp, Bandera Hills."

"Good," said Wild Wolf with satisfaction, the war-spirit of his people blazing in his eyes, and shown in poise of form and motion. "Let Comanches come. Big Foot Wallace and his brother brave will go on war-path. Black

Bear will go to lodge of his chief. Warnona will give him venison and corn to eat. She will give him another mustang. Black Bear will ride back to the lodges of our people. Wild Wolf want his braves on San Miguel. Wild Wolf and Water Warrior will ride fast on trail. Has Black Bear seen enemies that wear no war-paint?"

"Bad Mexican. Bad white men. On San Miguel."

"Who chief?"

"Capitan Caramba."

"It is enough. Trail of White Hair and his daughter, and the slaves whose skin is black as the night when moon hides, points to San Miguel. We will ride fast. We will say to them that war-cries of Comanche will wake them from sleep, that scalping-knife will shine in their eyes if wagons make trail beyond San Miguel. Are my brother's ears open? Warcries of Wacos soon sound on plain."

"Black Bear's ears open. Wild Wolf's words good."

"Warnona comes," said the chief.

As he spoke, the beautiful squaw came dashing up the trail, mounted upon a magnificent horse, black as ebony, with another animal in the lead, and both horses snorting with excitement, they evidently not having been backed for some time previous.

Tossing the jaw-strap of the animal in the lead to George Adler, Warnona dismounted and delivered the one she had ridden to her lord, and without betraying by word or look that she was aware of any addition to their party.

Our young friend quickly transferred his saddle and bridle from the injured horse to the one which the squaw brought him, and mounted as rapidly as the nature of his condition would allow; he being very giddy, and his brain oppressed with a dull, heavy, leaden pain, but still eager to be on the trail of the wagons, for he had the opportunity of reading the character of the Waco chief, and he now believed, without doubt, that the Bowens had broken camp.

"Warnona will give parched corn and venison to Black Bear," directed the chief, as he mounted his impatient steed. "She will give him a mustang. He will ride back to lodges of Nueces. Comanches have had war-dance. They gallop toward the Big Water. I have spoken."

"Will moon grow small before Warnona looks again in the eyes of Wild Wolf?" asked the squaw, earnestly.

"Wild Wolf cannot say when the war-path will end," replied the chief. "When he sends red arrow to Warnona, she will ride fast to Waco camp. She will say to my braves that Wild Wolf's war-cry sounds alone on San Miguel. When Warnona hears Comanche death yells in the wind, she may look for her chief soon."

Swinging the end of the long jaw-strap hissing about the hams of his fiery mustang, the chief of the Wacos shot up the river toward the ford, followed by George Adler, who instinctively bent, cringing down over his saddle, as he passed through the dense thickets, bearing in mind his late narrow escape from the deadly lasso-snare of the dastard Mestizo.

CHAPTER X.

THE IGNOBLE QUARTETTE.

WHEN Frank Ames and his three friends left Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill at George Horner's bar-room, they proceeded at once to the Menger House, ordered their horses to be cared for, and although it was a late hour, bribed the steward to get them up a first-class supper.

After satisfying their appetites, they procured a fresh supply of cigars, ordered a double-bedded room, and directed the clerk to send up a half dozen "Piper Heidsieck." They then bent their wavering way up the stairs to their apartment, piloted by a diminutive darky, who grinned from ear to ear, as the newly-arrived guests strove so manfully to make steady steps.

At last they reeled into the room assigned them and sunk heavily into chairs, ordering the hall-boy as he went out, to bring up the wine.

"I say, boys," spoke up Frank Ames, "I couldn't have kept up the square gent biz any longer with them scouts. I was playing my points, and I'm very glad you took the cue and didn't sling any Galveston slang. Big Foot Wallace, I can see, is a tart. He's as honest

as Ben Franklin, and money wouldn't hire him to go on a crooked trail. I know what I'm talking about, so you needn't laugh, Burke Barnes."

"I think I have heard you say, a good many times," said the latter, "that every man had his price."

"Well, perhaps you have, Burke, but the big scout is an exception. I know that if he had any knowledge of the Bowen outfit, and should see us on their trail, he'd keep his eye on our movements and spoil our plans, perhaps, especially if he thought us fast bloods."

"You did the thing up brown," said another, John Stephens by name; "but I came mighty near bursting."

"I'm glad you didn't," said Frank, "for much depends upon our getting out of this burg in square shape."

"Don't you think," said Barnes, "that old Bowen played a right sharp game on you?"

"He may think so," was the retort, "but in the end, he'll wish he had said, 'Here, Frank, take her, and God bless you.'"

These words caused a perfect roar of merriment.

"I don't see where the laugh comes in," said Frank, savagely. "Don't you fellows think I'm good enough for Belle Bowen?"

"Of course we do. We were laughing at the 'God bless you' part of it," said Burke. "But the question now is, what are we four going to do against the old man and the niggers? I tell you, he'll fight like a fiend, if we try to abduct Belle openly from the camp."

"Do you take me for a fool?" asked Frank. "Why, I have twenty men to back me, besides yourselves."

"What do you mean?" inquired Barnes, determined to pump him. "You don't suppose we swallow any such bosh as that. Where are those twenty men of yours?"

"I can get as many men as I am able to pay for their services. And I can do that, I reckon. Don't I hold the note of Colonel Bowen for twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"But if you steal his daughter, he won't pay it."

"Great Caesar! When I'm married to Belle, I shall be worth two hundred thousand, at the least."

"But perhaps she won't marry you?"

"There is no perhaps about it. I say, she shall!"

"What will your friend Adler do, in that case?"

"I don't care a copper continental what he does! I think as much of having revenge on him, as I do of the colonel's money. Though it isn't his. It's all Belle's; though if Ed should turn up, he could claim half of it."

"He'll make you turn up your toes, Frank, if he ever does. That reminds me, it is very possible that Colonel Bowen knows where he is, and is even now on the way to Ed's ranch."

"By Heavens!" cried Frank, "I never thought of that, Burke; but it looks reasonable. However, I don't care a cuss. I can buck against the whole family."

"I know one thing," said the other; "and that is, that George Adler is up this way. When we left, he hadn't been seen around the Trinity for some days. I begin to think, Frank, we've got a hard row to hoe before we corral Miss Belle. But I am forgetting those twenty men. Ain't that a joke, though?"

"You'll see it ain't. But here comes the wine."

"Well, Ames," continued Barnes, "when we get that crowd together, I reckon we'd better dash over the Rio Grande, and take a turn or two, for luck."

"Come here to the lounge, boys," said Frank. "The walls have ears in trying times like these."

All seated themselves as directed, and their host began:

"Now, boys, I'm going to tell you a very important secret. You remember Duncan Dudley, who got up and dusted with old Adler's money, and did that forgery?"

"Of course; the young rooster he had adopted."

"Well, I've been in correspondence with that pious young man ever since he absconded, and he has often helped me out when I had lost heavy at cards. He has been on the Trinity several times since he sloped, but no one knew it except myself. He is the man who is going to collect the crowd to assist me, and the agreement is that he is to have the money the colonel has along with him to pur-

chase land with. He is more afraid of George Adler than he is of the devil; and if he gets him into his power, I wouldn't give a picayune for George's chances. But I do believe if Dudley thought Adler was on this trail, he wouldn't take a hand in the game."

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Frank arose hastily and opened it. The hall-boy stood before him with a letter, which he handed him, saying:

"This is for the captain of the four men who arrived to-night. It ain't directed to nobody."

Frank tore open the envelope. Inside was one of the hotel cards, on which was written one word—"Caramba."

Turning to the negro, Frank Ames asked:

"Is the gentleman who gave you this below?"

"Ya-as, marse!"

"Send him up immediately!"

As he said this, he tore the card in small pieces. The next moment the door opened, and the Mestizo whom George Adler had met at Horner's entered, his face swollen from the blow he had received.

As the door closed, Frank asked in a low voice:

"Are you one of Capitan Caramba's men?"

"Si, senor," replied the half-breed, placing his fingers across his lips, in sign of caution.

"He sent you to San Antonio to look out for me?"

"Si, senor!"

"Where is his camp?"

"On San Miguel."

"How far from the Fort Ewell trail?"

"Twenty miles."

"East or west of the trail?"

"West."

"Will you return, and report my arrival?"

"Si senor!"

"Have you seen two wagons, one drawn by two horses, the other by four mules, both traveling together?"

"Si, senor. On plaza to-day."

"Have they left San Antonio?"

"Gone to Medina. Camp there now."

"Good! How came you to get your face mashed?"

The Mestizo grated his teeth furiously, as he hissed:

"White man strike me, but my knife shall cut his heart! Mebbe so you know him? Come from Trinity."

Frank Ames started as though he had been shot.

"What is his name?" he asked eagerly.

"He is the enemy of Capitan Caramba. I was on watch to kill him, when he strike me. But I will cut him into little pieces, and feed him to coyotes!"

"How do you know he is the enemy of your captain?"

"El Capitan Caramba send me to watch for him. He tell me his name. I hear him speak it when he ask for letter at post-office."

"Well, what is his name?"

"Senor George Adler!"

Frank Ames started, as though a rattle-snake had sounded its warning at his feet. Bending toward the Mestizo, while his friends looked on in wonder, he added:

"Is he—is George Adler in town now?"

"Mebbe so. But soon go on trail. Hear him talk much heap with scout, Big Foot Wallace."

"Are he and the Big Scout good friends?"

"Si, senor!"

"Get your horse and follow him. Kill him! Do you hear me? Kill him to-night. Kill the man who struck you. Here is gold! You shall have more, when I know your knife has split his heart!"

"Mil gracias, senor!" said the half-breed, taking the money. "He shall die. He shall not see the sun rise."

"Go, then, before you lose trace of him! If you can send me word, or if you can accomplish your purpose to-night, ride fast to the San Miguel, and say to Capitan Caramba that Frank is coming, and the game is in our hands. You will remember?"

"Bueno, senor!" And touching his sombrero, the Mestizo departed with hasty steps on his mission.

"Who, in the name of wonder, is that?" asked Burke, the words that passed between Ames and the half breed, not having been heard by him and the others.

"I never saw him before," said Frank, evasively.

"We can well believe that," was the rather angry retort. "None of us ever saw such a villainous looking human in East Texas, unless at a circus. But it is quite evident that you knew something of him before; and as we are engaged in an enterprise which may cost us our lives, it is nothing more than fair that we should know all the *ins* and *outs* of it."

Frank Ames began to realize that he had already gone too far in disclosing secrets, and that he must now explain everything, or risk being deserted by his old comrades in riot and dissipation.

"Can't you fellows give me time to think over what I have just learned? Of course I intend to explain it all to you. We are in the same boat, and all have a right the course we are sailing. That man is a half-breed, a spy, and, I should judge, a paid assassin, in the service of Dudley Duncan. You see that he has recently had a severe blow in the face. Who do you suppose gave it to him?"

The three men naturally gave it up.

"It was George Adler that struck him."

"Then George is in San Antonio?" asked Burke.

"He is in San Antonio," said Ames, in a decided tone.

"That means heavy business ahead on the trail," said Stephens. "Frank, you had better not venture on the plaza until we know that he has left."

"Boys, we must disguise ourselves," put in Barnes.

"But how can we do it?" inquired Frank.

"Put these clothes in our saddle-bags, and get some cheap rough togs. Then shave off our mustaches, and get some heavy false beards—"

"You forget," interrupted Ames, "that nearly every one in West Texas wears long hair, and ours is cropped so close that an Indian would slip us by in the scalping biz."

"Don't joke on that subject," said Burke. "We may lose our hair, short as it is. I heard a ranchero on the Plaza say that the Comanches were on the war-path, and coming down country."

"This must be attended to at once. I am glad you spoke of it, John," said Frank. "It is dark now, and pretty late. Burke, will you go with me? We will awaken some Jew, and give him a chance to make a few dollars."

"Yes, I'll go," agreed Burke, "for I begin to see that things are getting complicated. But how came George Adler to go for that Mestizo?"

"Why, Dud. Duncan sent the spy here to lay for Adler, and kill him. By some means, he has received information that George has followed the Bowens, or else it was a mere suspicion that he would do so, and sent this half-breed to kill him."

"It seems to me that Duncan must have some extraordinary means of ascertaining the movements of people at a distance."

"Boys," said Frank in a hoarse whisper approaching the lounge, "have you not often heard of Capitan Caramba, the bandit, who was at one time leagued with Cortina, the scourge of the Rio Grande?"

"Certainly," said Burke. "Who has not? He is a Texan, but has leagued himself with the most desperate Mexican outlaws. It is not long since he stopped a coach on the San Antonio and El Paso line, and went through the passengers, besides slashing the mail-bags, and carrying off the safe of the Express Company. I tell you, he's a terror."

"Pards," whispered Frank, "Dudley Duncan and Capitan Caramba are one and the same man!"

The young men were silent in their astonishment.

"I should have told you this before, boys," said Ames, "but I feared you might leave me in the lurch. But you'll all stand to your compact won't you?"

"Come," said Burke, "we'll go for the disguises. We have come thus far and we'll see you through. Come; I'm desperate enough to go in for anything."

Frank caught Burke's hand in a shake of satisfaction, and the two young men left the hotel; being directed to the establishment of Uncle Jose, an old and well-known pawn-broker, near the San Pedro. From him they purchased the necessary disguises, then returned to the Menger House, and after a brief deliberation, decided to start without delay in the direction of the Rio Frio, in order to be on hand at the capture of the wagons. Ordering

their horses, without once thinking of the pack-mule and provisions they had engaged Martin Campbell to purchase for them, the four pards in iniquity galloped away from the Alamo City, until they were half way to the Medina. Then halted, and assumed their disguises; after which they continued on, passing the ford a little before the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER XI.

EL MESTIZO.

WILD WOLF sat his horse like a centaur, his supple and graceful form acting in unison with each movement of his but half-tamed steed, his plumes of eagle-feathers flaunting and mingling at times with the long festoons of Spanish moss.

George Adler came on close after, and in a short space of time, the two men broke from the timber, and entered the clear space at the ford. The Waco chief halted, and indicated by a wave of the hand that George was to do likewise. Then he listened intently for a few moments.

"Waugh!" burst from Wild Wolf's lips, in surprise. "Does my white brother bear anything on the trail?"

"No, I hear nothing," was the young man's answer.

"Water Warrior's head much bad. Come. Wait see who ride fast in night;" and the Indian urged his horse back into cover, followed by George, who, upon coming to a halt in the bushes, distinctly heard the sound of approaching steeds, evidently coming up at a fast gallop. But a very brief time elapsed, when, up the wagon-road from the direction of San Antonio, dashed two horsemen at headlong speed, who, as they reached the open approach to the ford, jerked their steeds to a halt.

"Dog-gone my great gran'mother's old settin' hen! I gins ter feel nat'r'l-like. I never air feelin' 'zactly straight an' plum—'thout I'm a-stampedin' on the wings o' chain-lightnin', an' chuck full o' biz. I couldn't sleep a wink, es I tolle yer, an' I felt a crawlin' at the ruts o' my hair, what I allers feels when things is goin' wrong. I'd like mighty well ter know ef George, thet new squar' an' solid pard o' ounr, hev 'roved safe, an' ef he's hed ther luck ter run ag'in' Wild Wolf."

"We'd better skute down-stream, and see how things bes panned out, I reckon, ole pard; or else, yer kin gi'n ther sign, an' hoop up ther red—"

At this instant the Waco chief raised his rifle and struck the stem of a sapling a hard blow. Like a flash of light the two scouts sprung to the earth, on the opposite side of their horses, cocked and rested their rifles over their saddles, and aimed at the point where the branches still swayed.

George Adler heard a low, peculiar sound, like the rapid and continuous gnashing of teeth, which he knew proceeded from his red comrade; and no sooner did this sound break the deathlike stillness, than the rifles of the scouts were withdrawn, and the hammers let down in the twinkling of an eye. Big Foot understood the language.

"Wa al, dol-blast yer, Wild Wolf! I hes gut a strong hankerin' ter shoot one o' ther feathers offen yer head, er trim yer eye-winkers with a blue whistler. Break brush, an' show yer party pictur', dog-gone yer!"

"Great Jerusalem!" said Post Oak Bill; "ther red gi'n me a cold chill, clean through my spinal nattermy. I hed thet cussed half-breed in my mind, er I shouldn't a' jumped from my critter, fer we hain't struck a section whar thar's ary need o' keepin' yer eyes peeled. Dang my pelt! Thar's thet solid George, straight up an' hunkie."

"Dang'd ef he ain't, dead sure an' sartin," said the King of the Post Oaks. "George, how does yer open an' shut by this time? Waco, what yer want ter bluff we'uns in sich a way fer? I thought that condemned Greaser war layin' fer us."

"Want show Water Warrior how quick great scouts act on war-path," said Wild Wolf, in reply.

"Who, in ther name o' Crockett, air Water Warrior?" asked Post Oak Bill. "Hes yer gut a red pard in ther bush! Ef yer hes, trot him out. Let us see ther color o' his paint."

George Adler smiled, as the Waco pointed to him.

"He, Water Warrior."

"Ther red hev gut a cog' hitched onter yer quick. Air thet hit, George?" asked Big Foot.

"I believe that is what he has been doing."

"How kin he ter gi'n yer thet handle?"

George then related his experience with the Mestizo, since his arrival on the Medina, which caused both the scouts to give vent to their surprise.

"Ther half-breed ain't a doin' all thet biz on his own 'count," asserted Big Foot. "Yer kin gamble heavy on somebody else bein' under the bush, a-urgin' him on. Mebbe so ther four prim galcots what's at ther Menger, hes know'd all thet time yer war ahead on 'em, ever since yer left ther Trinity. Mebbe so, they hes promised ther yaller cuss a stake of he wifes yer out; but, es I said afore yer struck out, yer hes gut ter keep yer eyes peeled, er thet half-breed 'll send yer ter kingdom come, on ther wbiz. Ef yer runs ag'in' him arter this, make a dead sure thing o' hit, an' don't 'low him ter bluff yer on ther die biz. Hes yer see'd ther camp o' ther Angel an' her dad, since yer come so dang'd nigh bein' choked offen ther yearth?"

"No. We were just going over to find out in what direction they have gone."

"What! Hes they levanted this time o' night?"

"Wild Wolf says he heard them start off."

"Did they see yer when yer was circussin' with ther Greaser, an' gut skeered?"

"I don't think there was any one awake. There was no one on watch that I could make out; and I can't account for their making a start at such an unseasonable hour."

"Ther ole curnil must 'a' see'd yer, er heerd ther rumpus. Le's splash through ther drink, an' 'vestergate. Whare's Warnona, chief?"

"Warnona at lodge. Black Bear at lodge. Ride fast from Bandera Hills."

"What in ther dickens air up thar, chief?"

"Cemanches on war-path. War-whoop soon sound on Frio. Mebbe so on San Miguel."

"Great Je-hoss-i fat!" exclaimed Post Oak Bill. "Ef thet air thet case, I must glide toward ther ranch at stompede, er ther cussed scarifyers 'll kerral ther leetle gall!"

"Whar did Black B'ar say ther painted bell-yuns war p'nted?" asked Big Foot Wallace.

"On prairie. Come toward Big Water. Rio Frio on one side trail. San Miguel other side."

"Then ther murderin' cusses air es liable ter strike fer ther San Miguel es any place. Bill, ole pard, we'll hev ter skute, an' take keer o' leetle Maggie, sure es yer is horned. George, thar ain't no danger o' ther Angel's outfit gittin' took in outen ther wet yit a while, onless they p'nts west, which they hain't gut no call ter do. Yer hed better foller 'em, an' tell 'em they must turn tail an' come back, er lose har. Pard Bill's ranch air in danger, an' his leetle gran'daughter air liable ter be scooped in by ther sculpers; so we'uns must glide ter ber 'bout es fast es hoss-meat kin bump hitself. We'll keep atween ther Curmanches an' ther wagons, an' fine yer es speedy es we kin."

Big Foot Wallace rattled these explanations and instructions off in a decisive manner, while Post Oak Bill showed great impatience and concern, as he walked his horse back and forth, eager to ford the river and spur toward the San Miguel, and little Maggie, whose mother, Bill's only child, had been brutally tortured to death by the same tribe that now galloped eastward, on their fearful errand of death to the innocent and unprotected.

Wild Wolf gave utterance to a prolonged yell, fired his rifle, and turning to George, said:

"Water Warrior tell Black Bear ride fast to Bandera Hills. Let him say to my braves, that war-path open on San Miguel."

George Adler realized that his new-made friends were forced to leave him; that duty called upon them to save one who was near and dear, as well as helpless, and although he was deeply concerned in regard to the safety of the Bowens, he could not now ask the aid of the scouts, but he said not a word in regard to having any one accompany him; just the opposite, for he urged them to make all haste to the help of the young girl at the lonely ranch on the San Miguel.

Bidding Big Foot to rejoin him, with Bill and Wild Wolf, on the last mentioned stream, at a point west of the Fort Ewell trail, as soon as they could, George was about to shake hands all around, when another yell sounded, this time from the other side of the river, followed by the clatter of horses' hoofs, and to his surprise, the two scouts and the Indian urged their animals at headlong speed, and

went plunging up the river, Post Oak Bill crying out as they went:

"Great Cæsar! That's Sharp Eye. Ther red devils air p'inted fer ther ranch, er he wouldn't be heyear!"

By the time the scouts had reached the opposite side of the Medina, a horseman appeared upon the high bank over their heads, and as he discovered them he gave a yell of joy. As the trio joined the stranger on the south bank he whirled his horse, waving his sombrero, and they all disappeared from view, galloping at headlong speed toward the southwest.

So exciting had been the occurrences of the night, unexpected and unthought of events transpiring in quick succession, that George, still suffering in body, sat his horse in a kind of stupor for some time after his friends had left him; and the Mestizo, had he been at the ford, would have been able to stab his foe in the back, even with the left hand that remained to him, so oblivious was he to everything around him.

George Adler had led a comparatively quiet life, and he now found himself suddenly launched upon the frontiers, with the dread dangers of the border in his path, seeing in imagination his darling Belle bound to the torture stake, while a hundred paint-daubed fiends danced in glee, as the forks of flame flashed in her pale, beautiful face, and howled in derision, as she moved her trembling lips in earnest prayer.

Drawing his hand across his eyes with a nervous, weary motion, as if to banish the picture conjured up by all that he had seen and heard, George was about to urge his horse toward the ford, when the sound of another steed, coming up through the bottom timber, fell upon his ear, and he alighted from his horse, tossed his rifle across the saddle, and stood, with a desperate light in his eye, ready to pull trigger upon the first view of the cowardly assassin who had thrice attempted his life.

Only a moment had he to wait, but instead of the fiendish face of the half-breed, the handsome features of Warnona burst into full view from the dark shades, her mustang coming at terrific speed, her long raven hair flying free, her face filled with an anxious, puzzled expression.

Before the disturbed branches had ceased to vibrate, and as the Waco squaw jerked her mustang to a halt in the illuminated opening, Black Bear came crashing through the undergrowth, and he also drew jaw-strap and leaned forward.

"My white brother will be great brave," he said. "Does squaw look like Mestizo that he points his rifle?"

"No; but I was confused, and had forgotten that Wild Wolf had signaled Warnona," he explained.

"Where Wild Wolf?" she then asked.

"He has gone to the San Miguel. Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill came from San Antonio and joined us here. A Texan called Sharp Eyes galloped to the bank yonder from Bill's ranch, and brought the news that the Comanches are on the prairie this side of the Frio; or, at least, so I understood by the talk of the scouts. Black Bear, Wild Wolf requested me to tell you to ride fast to Bandera Hills and order the Waco braves on the war-path, down the San Miguel, to the ranch of Post Oak Bill."

Black Bear spoke not a word, but plunged his horse into the waters of the Medina, which curled away, on either side of him, as the sinewy animal swam rapidly to the south bank.

Lifting his sombrero in farewell to Warnona, George Adler also urged his horse to the ford.

"Where does Water Warrior ride?" asked the squaw.

"To find the trail of the two wagons."

"My white brother goes to save the scalp of his squaw. Are not Warnona's words true?"

"Yes, I go to try and prevent her from being murdered."

"Good," she said. "Warnona will go. Find wagon trail."

"I shall be very much rejoiced to have my red sister's company, for I am not posted in reading sign. But will not Wild Wolf be angry?"

"Wild Wolf will be glad," she said, with a smile.

In five minutes after reaching the opposite side of the river, George and his companion rode into the deserted camp of the Bowens.

While the young man was searching the thickets, Warnona discovered the dead bear, and proceeded to cut several rich steaks from it. They then went together to the margin of the timber and looked out on the plain.

Not two rifle-shots away, clearly seen in the moonlight, was a man, with one hand upraised, galloping like the wind toward the south.

"Ugh!" broke from the lips of Warnona.

"Who is it?" asked George, quickly.

The squaw said but a single word in reply: "EL MESTIZO."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

AFTER Colonel Bowen had ordered his slaves to hitch up as fast as was possible, the latter portion of the command being quite superfluous, after the negroes had seen the carcass of the huge bear, he brought some water and bathed Belle's head, who soon recovered, and sat up on her couch in the Dearborn.

"Oh! papa," the young girl cried, "I wish we were back on the Trinity. This has been a night of horrors. Have you not seen some strange sights while I have been unconscious?"

"Well," said the colonel, at length, and speaking as if he would rather say nothing on the subject, "what have you seen, my dear, that you consider so strange? I have killed a black bear that had probably frightened you very much; but that is not a strange thing to see in this portion of Texas. You ought not to have left the wagon, Belle. I shall station the servants on guard hereafter."

"I see that they are hitching up. Are we going on further, papa?"

"Yes. I think it better to travel now; it is so much cooler in the small hours of the morning."

"You are trying to deceive me, papa! I am sure that you have seen more than that bear, or you would not move camp so soon."

"I asked you what you had seen, my child; and you have not told me yet. Let us compare notes."

"Well, to begin with, I saw an Indian, all daubed with paint, only a few yards from here."

The colonel started, with a look of surprise, for he had disbelieved his own senses, upon reflecting on the face he had seen among the foliage. He now knew that there had been really an Indian at the camp, and he was greatly mystified, as well as not a little alarmed. However, after a moment's thought, he decided that no hostile party could be on the Medina, and that the warrior in question must be some friendly Indian in the service of the State.

He explained, in his way, the presence of the brave to his daughter; but she startled him still further by relating the strange sight which had at the first attracted her attention; namely, the half-breed crawling along the path, and the desperate fight between the two men, which had ended in both falling headlong down the bank into the river.

Colonel Bowen was more puzzled and alarmed than his words or looks indicated, for he strove to appear unconcerned; but Belle was thoroughly frightened by these strange occurrences, and the dread possibilities that the future might still have for them.

"The men whom you saw fighting were doubtless enemies," the colonel explained. "One of them, some precious Mexican horse-thief; and they would have met and fought just the same if we had not been here. I doubt very much if they knew of our presence; and that Indian, I presume, lives near at hand. But there is nothing to fear. For the future, however, I will be on the alert; and woe be to any lawless men, red or white, who interfere with us. Now, do try and get to sleep, Belle. We will push toward the San Miguel, where we can get fish and game."

"I fear we are going to our death, papa."

"Oh, nonsense, Belle! you are feeling worn out from our journey, and you are weary from loss of sleep. You will be as bright as a lark in the morning." And, wishing to avoid further comments on the situation of affairs, the colonel hastened to mount his horse. He then ordered Rosa, a young quadroon, to get into the Dearborn with her mistress, directed the other slaves to keep quiet, and not be alarmed, and then riding forward, guided the teamsters down the stream, on the margin of the timber, and cautioning them against making any outcries to the animals.

As their course led over an easy, moss-grown prairie, the motion of the vehicle lulled Belle to sleep, in spite of all her anxiety and forebodings.

Nothing could be more terrible for Colonel Bowen to contemplate, than the thought of the beautiful girl who had grown into his heart, wedded to the son of her mother's murderer; and he felt a certainty that had he remained on the Trinity, Frank Ames would have found a way to abduct Belle, and compel her to become his wife. Besides this, there was something nearly as terrible that he dreaded. If Frank should endeavor to collect, according to law, the note of his father's which was in his possession, his past history would be raked up, and he would be disgraced in his old age, after having passed the latter years of his life in repenting of the wrong doings into which he had been led through the evil influence of Jack Ames.

With such possibilities hanging over him, he could not stay on the Trinity, or anywhere that was known to Frank, and he hoped now to find a place where he could establish a home, and pass the remainder of his days with the daughter who was now all the world to him.

Not for a moment did the old man think it possible that Frank Ames would be able to trace him; much less, that the latter was now within fifteen miles of him, and in hot pursuit.

Colonel Bowen thought too of George Adler, and although he knew nothing against the character of the young man, and was positive that he loved his daughter, and also that Belle loved him; he, for the reason that George's father had once loved his murdered Agnes, had resolved that neither should this be. This resolution, however, was made more through selfishness than aught else; for he wished to keep Belle with him while life lasted, no other having a claim upon her.

The happiness of his daughter was not considered; or if so, was outweighed by his own selfish feelings, and being of a stubborn disposition he resolved to keep on, although he had been forewarned, by several whom he met in San Antonio, of the dangers in his path.

With these thoughts filling his mind, the colonel rode on, his head bent forward; had not this been the case, he would have seen afar to his right, a man lashing his horse at a terrific rate of speed.

The face of this night-rider was swollen, and contorted with fiendish rage and intense pain, and his right hand, which was uplifted as he rode, was bandaged with rags, and dripping with the blood. But even had colonel seen this man at the time when he arrived at a point abreast of the wagons, he would have lost sight of him the next moment, for a drifting cloud covered the moon, and not only prevented the Mestizo from being discovered, but also screened from view a party of horsemen who, although far off on the plain, had been seen and recognized by the keen-eyed spy. Before the moon again rolled clear in the blue sky, and illuminated the prairie, the solitary horseman had disappeared; but a motte of post oaks, some two miles ahead of the wagons, indicated his hiding-place, as well as that of the equestrian party—or would have done so to Colonel Bowen, had he been so fortunate as to have seen the night-riders before the moon became obscured.

Had the colonel been accustomed to border life, he would have avoided the vicinity of the motte, even though he might have had every reason to suppose that it was impossible for any foe to be lurking within its shadows; but he seemed to be utterly oblivious of any break in the level plain ahead of him—in fact, he was half asleep, as were also the negro drivers. The mules in the lead naturally followed Colonel Bowen, who, in a fast walk, proceeded directly toward the motte, in such a course as to pass within a few yards of the undergrowth. Had the mare he rode been a mustang, or even of the Spanish stock of Mexico, the animal would have steered clear of the motte without control of its rider, as it would have scented the presence of human beings; and all on the border, who do not belong to the "outfit," are avoided by the animals of the same, when those animals belong to the above mentioned breeds. A mule or a mustang will scent the presence of the lurking Indian about a camp, and will snort with fright and alarm; but the scent of the first mentioned is stronger than that of the last.

As we have said, the horse ridden by the

colonel pointed directly past the *motte*, which was not a quarter of an acre in extent; and, as the animal reached the further extremity of the same, it suddenly threw up its head with a snort of alarm, at the same time springing away from the dense shadows.

But too late did the beast scent danger; for, at this moment a lasso hissed through the air, the noose of which fell quickly over the head and shoulders of Colonel Bowen, binding his arms to his side as in a vise; while, at the same instant, his horse sprung in frantic bounds toward the open plain, the movement jerking the old man violently to the earth.

As the colonel struck the sward, a ruffianly looking Mexican, with an exultant expression upon his ugly yellow face, sprung from the undergrowth directly astride of the prostrate man, whose breath had been knocked from his body by the terrible fall.

As Colonel Bowen struck the earth, and the Mexican sprung like a panther upon him, the sharp reports of rifles broke from the dark shades, and both the negro drivers fell dead from their seats beneath the wheels; while other Mexicans sprung to the heads of the horses and mules, grasping the bridles, and checking the frantic animals.

The report of fire-arms awakened the other slaves, and also Belle; the former filling the air with their screams of terror, the latter grasping her rifle, and gazing in fear and horror from the Dearborn.

Now, out from the *motte* dashed half-a-dozen horsemen and half-a-score more Mexicans, these last on foot, the mounted men being whites, but with villainous and brutal faces which were stamped with exultant satisfaction, as they spurred their horses up to the wagons.

"Jerk them niggers down, and choke the squall out of them! Unhitch the mules, and throw off the harness! Work lively there! Jim, see if our beauty is there."

Thus spoke one who appeared to be the leader of the bandit horde, who, although but a young man, showed in his face the marks of dissipation and a life of recklessness.

He was attired in a fancifully decorated costume of buckskin, consisting of the inevitable breeches and jaqueta of the Rio Grande; and his sombrero, as well as his revolvers, belt, and bowie bilt, were richly ornamented with gold filagree work. His hair was long, and black as midnight, as were his eyes, that now gleamed with a murderous light, though he had not drawn a weapon.

The man whom he designated as Jim, spurred his horse to the rear of the Dearborn, and looked within it. It was only for a flitting instant that he had the power of sight; but, in that instant, he saw a young and beautiful girl, standing erect, braced for defense, her rifle cocked and clasped tightly to her shoulder, the muzzle of the weapon within a foot of his head! He stood, without the power of motion, his features became of an ashen hue, the next there came a blinding flash and a far-sounding report, and the outlaw, without a sound passing his lips, fell forward over his saddle-horn with a bullet through his brain, his horse bounding with a snort toward the open plain, as its rider fell upon the prairie sward.

As the report of the rifle burst upon the ears of the bandits, and the horse dashed away, they all gazed in surprise toward the Dearborn, only to be doubly amazed at seeing a young girl leap from the wagon, and with a cocked revolver in each hand, dash between them and the *motte*, her eyes filled with desperation, her weapons pointed toward the ruffian horde.

Up to the prostrate form of her father ran Belle Bowen, and before the bandits had recovered from their surprise, another sharp report rung out. Then they saw their comrade, the Mexican who bestrode Colonel Bowen, stagger to his feet and beat the air with his hands like a blind man groping his way; then the blood burst from his mouth and nostrils, and he too fell a corpse.

Then Belle sprung to the opposite side of her prostrate father, turned and faced the outlaws, with revolvers presented, and her fingers on the triggers.

All this happened in a moment's time. The next, a score of weapons were leveled at the daring and desperate girl; but darting like an arrow from the bow, the bandit chief spurred his horse between Belle Bowen and his lawless crew, at the same time his revolvers flashing in the moonlight, as he yelled:

"The first man who pulls trigger dies on the spot! This girl brings gold to our band. Jim ought to have known better than ride up to the wagon in that manner; and if Antone couldn't evade the shot of a woman, he was out of place in this crowd!"

Sullenly the men lowered their weapons, and gazed with vengeful looks toward the fair girl who stood over the senseless form of her father, with her pistols still leveled, and desperate daring shown in the poise of her form and the glance of her eye.

Near the wagons were the terrified negroes upon their knees, praying with quivering lips, all except Rosa, the quadroon, who still remained in the Dearborn.

"Wait a minute, boys! I'll square this thing with you to your satisfaction. This girl is my game; remember that! and I'll have the heart's blood of the man who dares to raise a weapon against her. Capitan Caramba makes no threat that he can't back up. You all know that, I hope, by this time!"

Turning on his horse the bandit chief now faced Belle Bowen, who with pallid face, but firm mien, gazed into his dark evil eyes without flinching.

The outlaw band were now filled with wonder, for it suddenly dawned upon them that their chief had exposed himself, by having turned his back upon the determined girl, and she had not fired upon him, for they knew, from what they had witnessed of her skill, that she could have killed him instantly.

As Capitan Caramba whirled his steed, he politely touched his sombrero, and exclaimed:

"Howdy, Belle Bowen! Allow me to express my admiration for your beauty, bravery and skill, and to request you to lower those rather dangerous weapons."

As her name fell from the bandit's lips, the girl started in astonishment; but she lowered her revolvers, and looked fearlessly into his face, while she demanded in a clear calm voice:

"Who are you, that dare speak my name in so familiar a manner? Who are you, whom I find in command of a horde of cowardly bandits, murderers of innocent, unarmed negroes? Who are you, who so outrageously assault a gray-haired man who never harmed you? Answer me—who are you?"

"Capitan Caramba, at your service, my brave beauty!" answered the outlaw chief, in a polite tone.

"I have heard of your dastard deeds," she said. "You are infamously famous; but I cannot think you as bad as those whom you command. I should have shot you in the back just now, had I not felt sure that my father, myself, and our servants would have all been murdered, had I done so. You are a white man—a Texan, I judge—and, by some means unknown to me, you have gained a knowledge of our names and our route. Let me beg of you—let me pray you, not to harm my poor father, and to save us from those Mexicans!"

"You shall not be harmed; but I must use some means to smooth over the effects of your rash shooting."

With these words, Capitan Caramba rode up to the Conestoga wagon.

"Here, Bud, hold my nag!" he ordered, as he slipped from his saddle. "Jump in this wagon, some of you, and throw everything out. There is a box of gold in there, if I am not mistaken; and that must be divided, after we get to our camp."

At this intelligence, the eyes of the ruffian horde brightened, and they all sprung with a will to obey him.

"Put everything that is of use to us into the Dearborn, then throw the harness and all useless articles back into the wagon. We will burn it when we leave. Jose, lead those horses this way."

The commands of the bandit chief were instantly obeyed, and the Dearborn was then drawn to the point where Belle and her father—the latter having recovered his senses—sat, side by side, on the sward, the young girl with her arms about the neck of the old man. As the wagon, with the outlaws approached, however, Belle sprung to her feet, and again grasped her revolvers.

"Put up your weapons, or I'll not answer for your lives!"

"Who, in the fiend's name, are you, sir bandit?" demanded Colonel Bowen of the chief, as he spoke.

"Never you mind who I am, but climb into that Dearborn lively, or some of these mild-

mannered men of mine may take a notion to cut your throat."

"Do as he orders, father. It is our only alternative. I fear we are doomed to death."

In her deep solicitude for her father, Belle neglected to watch the movements of the outlaws, and, at a motion from their chief, two Mexicans jerked the pistols from her hands, and bound her securely. Two others tied the hands of the colonel; and, this done, they were both lifted into the back of the Dearborn, neither of them daring to speak a word.

"Jose, take the reins, and start toward the camp. We will soon overtake you," ordered the chief, and away went the affrighted steeds over the plain to the west.

Three negroes and a young quadroon still crouched upon the plain, weeping and praying, and Capitan Caramba, seeing them, cried out, in a careless way:

"There's a hole in that *motte*, boys. Throw Jim and Antone into it, and cover them up. Then you can do what you please with them niggers. I'm off! Follow on as soon as you set fire to the wagon."

Springing upon his horse, Capitan Caramba spurred out over the plains toward the Dearborn in the distance; but he had not galloped a thousand yards, when his ears were filled with yells of agony, as the brutal Mexicans murdered the negroes. Then, from the *motte* arose shrieks, so full of horror, dread, and deathly terror, that even the outlaw chief clapped his hands over his ears. He turned in his saddle, and saw the wagon in flames. He knew that none of the blacks were alive, except the young quadroon, and that she was in the power of his merciless Mexican followers. He still heard her screams of agony, but the flames could not flash their light through the thick foliage of the *motte*, and reveal the fiendish, dastardly crime that was being perpetrated.

CHAPTER XIII.

EL CAPITAN CARAMBA.

WORDS cannot express the feelings of Colonel Bowen and his daughter, as they fully realized their desperate condition, after the excitement of the capture was over, and they lay bound in the Dearborn. They knew that their lives were in danger, for the murderous deeds of Capitan Caramba and his mongrel horde had been known to them long before they left their home on the Trinity.

Little did they then think that they would ever be in the power of the merciless bandit, who, report said, was in league with that most notorious outlaw, Juan N. Cortina, the scourge of the Rio Grande.

But that which puzzled them most of all, was the fact that their names and route were known to the bandit. However, this was partly explained to the mind of Belle, by the remembrance of what had been said to her by the Mexican that had been shot and then hanged on the plaza in San Antonio. This man, who had no doubt merited his fate, terrible though it was, must have been a spy of Caramba's, and not only that, but there were others in the Alamo City who were connected with him.

As Belle thought of this, she suddenly recalled the features of one of the Mexicans she had observed at the *motte*. She had been impressed with the idea at the time that she had somewhere seen those swollen repulsive features, and she now recalled the face she had seen on the Rio Medina. It was all plain now.

He was the man she had discovered crawling along the cow-path, and who soon afterward became engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with some other man, whose face she had been unable to see.

Both men had fallen into the river while in desperate fight. This Mexican, it was now evident, had been the victor, and had galloped on to guide his comrades. Then came the question: who was the man with whom he had fought? If an enemy of the outlaws, and consequently friendly to her father, why did he not cry out and gain their aid? Next, she thought of the face she had seen, or dreamed that she had seen, among the foliage—the face of George Adler. How could it have been possible that George could be so near? It could not be. And if it were possible, he would not have been in the company of a war-painted Indian. The mysteries of the night were beyond solving. The horrors and crimes, however, were standing out boldly and forcing her thoughts from every other subject.

It was probable that the Mexican spy of the Medina had met Capitan Caramba by accident, when the latter was abroad on some foray; and the spy, having witnessed the start of the wagons, had made his report to his chief, which had resulted so disastrously to her and hers. Both the colonel and his daughter had heard the piercing shrieks of the quadroon girl, and trembled as their imagination pictured the fearful crimes that were being committed at the *motte*.

So utterly prostrated was Colonel Bowen, so regretful for what he had left undone, that he mentally cursed himself for his selfishness and cowardice, in not remaining on the Trinity, and defying Frank Ames to do his worst. But these regrets and self-accusations came too late. He was now in the very depths of a hopeless despair. But as the colonel sunk deeper and deeper into despondency, Belle, much to her surprise, became more defiant and hopeful; for she recalled the fact that George Adler had promised to follow and protect her, and also that the noted scouts, Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill were aware of the direction they had taken, knew all the dangers of the route, and would doubtless make it their business to ascertain if herself and people had arrived safe at the San Miguel. The outlaws had been amazed at the daring and skill displayed by the young girl; but their surprise was nothing compared with that of Belle herself.

On the Rio Medina she had fainted with fright, at the sight of a bear; but no sooner had she been awakened by the report of rifles, than she became insanely desperate, her fear and timidity being drowned by her most heart-rending concern for the safety of her father and the helpless slaves.

As these thoughts came into her mind, she remembered that she had cast aside her rifle after she had shot the outlaw from the rear of the Dearborn, and that probably the gun was still in the vehicle, as the wagon cover having hidden all her movements, the outlaws doubtless supposed she had used a revolver.

She now resolved to try and loosen her bonds, recover her weapon and defend herself and father, should they again be assaulted. At this moment, however, she heard a sound which induced her to postpone the attempt. Capitan Caramba urged his steed up to the wagon and cried out:

"I hope you are having a pleasant journey, Belle Bowen. I am pleased to state, in order to somewhat relieve your mind in your present trying position, that Frank Ames will soon be in my camp. He has paid me to capture you for him, and he proposes to marry you as quickly as a priest can be induced to risk his neck in such a lawless crowd as mine. But just now I have a different idea. He has been too cowardly to win an unwilling bride by his own exertions, so I feel the less compunction for going back on him. I detest a coward. Your bravery and daring have impressed me greatly, and I think I'll marry you myself!"

Without waiting for a reply, the bandit chief rode off at headlong speed over the plain in advance of them. A heavy groan burst from the lips of the colonel at the mention of Frank Ames. He did not hear the latter part of the outlaw's speech, in regard to his own intentions with reference to Belle.

At first a sickening feeling of aversion at the thoughts conjured up by the bandit chief when he avowed his intention of making her his wife, took possession of Belle; but she soon grew more calm, and the anguish of her father caused her to drown all considerations of herself.

All was now plain to them both, except the identity of Capitan Caramba, who seemed to know their whole history, and whose voice at times had a sound that seemed to them familiar. Frank Ames had known of their departure, followed them, and sent the Mexican spy to inform Capitan Caramba in regard to their course and destination. Belle was filled with amazement. She now knew that Ames and this bandit chief must have been intimate friends in the past. The manner and words of the latter showed it. But who could he be?

The old colonel was in despair. He knew the desperate character of Frank Ames, and it was this knowledge that had made him leave his home on the Rio Trinity. He realized that he and Belle were in the power of those who would hesitate at no crime; yet he felt that he would rather they should both be so situated than that his darling should be linked for life

to the son of Jack Ames. His brain was now on fire, and he wanted—oh, so much—to reveal the secret of his wife's death to his daughter, but he dared not do so, for he knew that Jack Ames had been spoken of by many, in Belle's presence, as his own old friend and boon companion. Belle would hate and despise him, if she knew that he had affiliated with a dastardly poisoner, a criminal of the deepest dye. Not only this, but she would naturally conclude that the fearful crime was the result of a vile conspiracy between them.

"Do not worry, papa," said the young girl. "Frank Ames will find out that his plans will be frustrated. God will never permit such a miscreant to succeed. I have not been idle all this time—I have good reason to believe there are those upon our trail—"

At this moment she was interrupted by the sound of many galloping steeds in the rear of the wagon, and she became aware that one of the horsemen was close up, and looking in upon them.

Glancing up, she saw the swollen, hideous face of the man she had seen crawling in the cow-path on the Medina, and afterward noticed at the *motte*.

With a horrid exulting laugh, the Mestizo, for it was none other, rode on to join his comrades, and all swept away over the plain, after their chief.

Belle could not repress a shudder as the laugh of the half-breed sounded in her ears, and the old colonel again groaned in agony of spirit; but, at this moment, she felt a hand grasp her ankle, and she drew up her feet, as if she feared some terrible reptile was in the wagon. For an instant, the blood in the poor girl's veins seemed to be congealing; then the thought occurred to her, that she had not seen Rosa with the other slaves, and that she had no doubt been concealed in the Dearborn.

With a powerful effort Bell rose to a sitting posture, and peered out into the darkness at the driver, who had been placidly smoking his pipe, without paying any attention to his captives; in fact, to do so, he would have been obliged to stand up, and look over the bales of goods which were piled behind him near the wagon seat.

Belle could distinguish nothing, so she uttered the name of the quadroon in a nervous whisper.

No answer came, but again her ankle was grasped, and she was now conscious that it was by a human being. Had she not felt positive that it was Rosa, she would have fainted with fright, for the daring and desperation which had upheld her at the *motte*, had now deserted her.

A mass of curls now soon swept her cheek, and trembling lips were at her ear, whispering:

"Here I am, Miss Belle! For the good Lord's sake tell me what Rosa can do for you!"

"Thank Heaven!" was Belle's fervent response. "Everything may depend upon immediate action. Put your hand into the breast of my dress, Rosa, and you will find a knife. Cut us loose quickly."

With trembling fingers the frightened slave obeyed, and a moment afterward, both Belle and the colonel were freed from their bonds.

Up to this time Colonel Bowen had seemed as helpless as an infant; but no sooner did he realize that he was free from the cruel cords, and that there was a chance of escape, than he sprang at once to a sitting posture, and whispered:

"God bless you, Rosa! I believe that Heaven has preserved you as an agent to save us from a terrible fate. I shall be myself in a moment. Belle, leap from the wagon, and lie still in the grass. You, Rosa, follow her. I will join you in a moment."

"I shall not leave you, father," said Belle, firmly. "Besides, it would be foolish to attempt leaving the wagon, while the driver is alive. He is certain to look back very soon, and when he finds we are gone, he will fire off his rifle as a signal to recall the bandits, and then we would be recaptured."

"You are right, my daughter. My head is not as clear as it might be; but if I kill the driver, will the horses keep on? That is the question. You must know that the outlaws will now and then look back to see if the wagon is following them."

"The horses will naturally follow their kind, especially in the night time. They are checked up so that they cannot stop to feed!

We must risk it at all hazards, and try our plan at once. The driver can be secured to his seat, as if alive."

"Your plan is an excellent one, Belle. You are a most remarkable girl. Give me the knife, Rosa. The driver must die!"

"Be sure that you strike a vital spot, father. But, to give you more confidence, I will stand here with my rifle, and although the report may break up our plan of escape, I will shoot him if he proves too agile and strong for you."

"Don't shoot, Belle! For God's sake, don't shoot!" pleaded her father, in a hoarse whisper. "Even if he kills me, you must make an effort to escape, by leaping from the wagon, and crawling through the grass, and away from the trail."

"Words are useless, papa. Make the attempt, and the cause of right and justice must succeed."

Rosa cowered at the feet of her mistress, and the old colonel, his knife grasped tightly in his hand, pressed a kiss upon his daughter's forehead, and then crept slowly but cautiously over the bales of goods toward the driver.

As if to favor the colonel, the wagon had struck a belt of "hog-wallow" prairie, and in consequence the violent swaying and jolting of the Dearborn obliged the Mexican driver to concentrate all his attention upon the guiding of his horses.

Instantly realizing this, Colonel Bowen crawled quickly forward until just in the rear of the driver, when, without a moment's pause for preparation, by a lightning-like movement, he knocked the sombrero from the doomed man's head, grasped him by the hair, pulled his form quickly backward, and then plunged the knife to the hilt in his breast.

There was no time for a struggle, or an attempt to ward off the deadly blow. Before the outlaw could realize that he was in danger, the life-blood spurted from his mouth and nostrils, smothering the shriek of horror and deathly fear that he strove to utter.

So instantly was he struck with death, that the reins did not fall from his hands; just the opposite indeed, for they were clutched in the death-grip, and held tightly after the breath of the outlaw had left his lungs forever. Steadying the dead man in the seat, the colonel cried out:

"Jump, Belle! Jump from the wagon, my child! We are free, thank God!"

Hastily catching up the loose ends of the reins, the colonel tied them around the body; then, with a rope which he secured from under the seat, he secured the corpse in a natural position, replaced the sombrero on the head, after which he wiped the blood from the face. There was now little outward change in the Mexican.

Filled with heartfelt joy at the prospect of escape, Colonel Bowen now crawled rapidly to the rear of the wagon, where he was caught around the neck by his daughter, her feelings finding vent at last, now that there seemed indeed a hope of freedom.

"Why did you not obey me, my child? Come, as quickly as we can! One moment's delay may cost us our liberty, if not our lives;" and springing out the rear end of the Dearborn, he assisted Belle and Rosa to the ground. Then sinking upon their knees, the young girl passed the rifle to her father, and they all crawled in haste from the trail into the tall prairie grass, and then disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHARP EYE.

On the morning of the day that Big Foot Wallace so effectually and promptly "civilized" Miguel, the Spy of Capitan Caramba, in San Antonio, a beautiful girl of some eighteen summers, in company with a young man, apparently a Texan, might have been seen galloping up the north side of the San Miguel, near the ribbon of timber which bordered each side of the stream.

Both were mounted upon spirited half-breed horses of speed and endurance, that evaded and tossed their heads playfully, as their fast-flying hoofs scattered the dew from the flowers and grass in their course. The young girl was Maggie Moore, the grand-child of Post Oak Bill, and her companion was a young ranchero, somewhat noted as a scout, and known by the name of Sharp Eye, which cognomen had been given him by Wild Wolf the Waco, with whom the young Texan had hunted and scouted upon many a trail.

But few knew or cared what his real name might be, and there was no man on the San

Miguel or the Medina, who was more respected. He was attired in a buckskin suit of Rio Grande make, and armed with a Sharp's rifle, Colt's revolvers, and bowie, while several raw-hide lassoes were attached to the cantle of his saddle, as well as a pair of *malettos*, or saddle-bags, a tin-cup, and canteen.

Maggie Moore was a brunette of striking beauty; and her flashing eyes and firmness of manner showed plainly that she was much braver and more fearless than the majority of her sex.

It was plainly to be seen that Sharp Eye and Maggie had long loved each other, as no shyness was observable in their intercourse. That there was an understanding between them none could doubt; and also, that one would, so to speak, go through fire and water for the other.

"Maggie, when did Bill say he would return to the ranch?" As Sharp Eye asked this question, he swept the plain ahead with his piercing glance.

"He went to meet Big Foot Wallace," was the reply. "They had arranged to go to San Antonio together, for ammunition; and when those two are in company it is difficult to say when they will head their mustangs for the San Miguel. But I think he will not be away for any length of time this trip, for he seems anxious and worried about leaving me. You know he must have been, or he would not have stopped at your ranch, and asked you to ride over and stay here until his return. I am very sorry that he has no more consideration for you. He must have thought that you had plenty of leisure. It is really too bad, I must say."

"Maggie," said Sharp Eye "while I have been basking in your smiles, I have lost sight of some very important matters, which ought to have been uppermost in my mind. When out hunting for 'Mavericks' yesterday, I met a party of Wild Wolf's warriors who had been after mustangs up the Frio, and they informed me that they had seen the camp of a large war-party of Comanches, which fact had caused them to hasten to their village in the Bandera Hills. They were about to send off one of their number immediately to their chief, Wild Wolf, who is now encamped below the Pleasanton ford on the Medina. Those fiends may strike across to the San Miguel and, guided by the stock trails, discover your home. I hope Bill will return soon, for I lay awake last night, thinking of your helpless condition should they drop in on us in that pleasant way they have."

"Why did you not speak of this before, Ed?"

"Well, Maggie, I did not wish to worry you, and banish your smiles until I was sure that there was danger; but, upon reflection, I have decided to inform you. I objected to your coming with me this morning, as you remember, for my main object is to ascertain if there are any signs of the Comanches on the plain. I intended to have stolen away from the ranch, but you were too watchful for me; however, we are both of us better mounted than any of the Indians can possibly be, and have besides the advantage of the timber to cover our movements. So far, we are all right."

"And do you really think the Wacos saw this war-party, or is it one of the frequent frontier scares?"

"There is no doubt whatever about it in my mind. I would believe any of the braves of Wild Wolf more readily than nine out of ten white men. If the reds do point for the ranch, we shall be forced to strike out toward the Medina."

"Ed, I shall not leave my home. All the Indians between Phantom Hills and the Staked Plains could not frighten me from my dear old cabin, my treasures, and my pets!"

"Don't say that, Maggie, for we could not defend ourselves. Should the Comanches discover the cabin, they would burn it over our heads, and roast us alive, if we were so foolish as to remain in it. We shall be obliged to gallop for help to the Medina. There are not men enough on the San Miguel, west of the old Fort Ewell trail, to hold their own against fifty Indians, unless all were within the log walls of a good block-house. So you see how it is."

"Ed, your conversation, if continued in that strain, will give me the blues. I came out for a good bracing gallop, and you will oblige me by changing the subject. Post Oak Bill is not

the man to leave any one whom he cared for, where there was danger of her losing her scalp. Do you think, Ed, that my hair is the fashionable color among the Comanches for decorating a shield or lance?"

"You do not know those red devils, Maggie, or you would not joke on so grave a subject," said Sharp Eye, again sweeping the prairie with his eagle glance. "You consider the ranch perfectly safe, for the reason that you have lived there a year, and have as yet seen no hostiles. Have you ever seen an Apache, or a Comanche, painted and prepared for war? Have you ever heard their blood curdling whoops?"

"I never have, Ed, and I don't care to. But I imagine they would not look more hideous than Wild Wolf and his braves."

"I see there is no use talking to you on this subject, Maggie. I will just say one thing more, and that is—no one, not even Post Oak Bill, can tell where the hostiles will strike. Settling on the frontier is like taking a ticket in a lottery. One may live for years unmolested, and his next neighbor may be butchered, his family tortured, or taken to what is worse than death, the first week they have been located in their new home. But, come; let us turn into the timber, and cross the creek. I wish to take a good look over the south plain toward the Rio Frio."

Both turned abruptly beneath the tall trees, and went crashing through the underbrush. It must have been Providence that prompted Sharp Eye to turn into the timber at that particular time and place, for the horse of the scout plunged directly into a dense undergrowth which served to screen the painted form of a Comanche spy.

Maggie Moore was destined to see a hostile in war-paint much sooner than she had anticipated.

So suddenly and unexpected were the horses turned into the bottom, that the lurking Indian had no time to retreat or spring aside; for as he realized his position, he sprung upward, and actually struck the back of his head against the nose of Sharp Eye's mustang, causing the animal to rear upward in its fright.

Away went the red brave toward the stream, and the young scout, feeling that their lives depended upon preventing the spy's return, went crashing after him through the underbrush.

Maggie remained motionless, her face blanched with horror. The young scout sprang to a standing position in his saddle, made a flying leap over the bushes that drooped into the water, directly upon the Indian, who was now swimming for life toward the opposite side of the stream.

The Comanche was almost paralyzed when he saw the scout fly from his saddle across the bushes and directly upon him. He had but just control enough over himself to make an attempt to dive under water; but this movement was executed too late. His determined foe was upon him. Had not the back of the Comanche been some distance beneath the water, from the fact that he was swimming, as do most of the Indians, "dog-paw," his spine would have been broken; but, although he was forced far below the surface, his head broke water at the same instant as did that of Sharp Eye, and red and white, with knives uplifted, lunged toward each other, struggling in the water in an endeavor to use their blades, and then, by a dexterous movement, each grasping the knife hand of the other at the wrist.

Thus gripped, the orbs of each man gazing into those of the other with murderous light, and with muscles and senses strained to the utmost, the hideous face of the Comanche contorted with fury at his inability to break from the vise-like grip of the young scout.

Slowly the two men drifted down the current, neither of them being able to gain any advantage over the other; Sharp Eye, all the while watching the facial muscles of his foe, ready to force him beneath the surface if he noticed any attempt at giving a signal whoop.

Maggie spurred her horse directly after the young scout, and as the latter sprung into the stream, she caught the bridle-rein of his steed, and sat in her saddle, her features pale as death, her eyes filled with horror, as she saw the paint daubed face of the Comanche rise above the surface, and witnessed the fierce struggles, and the lightning-like play of hands, as each for a moment strove to stab the other

before wrists were grasped; then, as the two floated slowly down the stream, and neither appeared to have gained any advantage, she sat with her lips wide apart, her eyes staring fixedly, until slowly the two heads vanished from view around the bend of the river.

With a half-suppressed cry of anguish, Maggie struck both the horses violent blows, and went crashing through the underbrush, soon arriving at a point where, once more, the agonizing sight met her view—the two heads still floating slowly, the eyes of the white man and the red-man still glaring into each other, the glittering steel of each still controlled by the other, by a grip that had caused the muscles of their arms to swell out in huge knots. Only one slight change did she notice. Sharp Eye had gotten his red foe turned partly about, forcing him to float with his back down the stream.

Maggie instantly comprehended the object of her lover's movement; for she saw, at some distance down the San Miguel, that a tree had fallen down the bank, one of its huge limbs, jagged and broken, projecting up the stream, its lower edge almost touching the water. Once more she urged the horses through the underbrush, but not daring to pass the floating combatants, for fear she would draw the attention of the Comanche down the stream, and in this way let him discover the danger that was awaiting him.

The friendly limb was over the current, but only on its outer edge; and Sharp Eye was forced to use great caution and skill, in order that his red foe should not pass the jagged branch which was now his only hope; for the young scout, although of great strength and hardihood, felt himself growing weak, while the iron-molded son of nature was apparently as fresh and full of vim as at the start.

Maggie's breath came and went in short gasps, and her brain was being racked with dread concern and indescribable anguish.

Still the two men floated on, the Indian seeming to comprehend that the strength of his foe was ebbing fast; the expression of which was noticeable upon the Comanche's face, all daubed though it was with ocher and vermilion.

This expression was, however, soon to be suddenly changed, for the nearly submerged foes were now approaching the point at which the life-blood of one or the other must mingle with the waters of the San Miguel.

The next moment would decide Maggie Moore's happiness or misery, for life; and she held her breath, in the intensity of her feelings.

Not two feet now separated the snag from the head of the Comanche, and Sharp Eye well knew that his life hung by a hair. Gathering up his entire strength, the young scout drew up his legs beneath the waters, until his knees touched his breast; then by a dexterous motion he kicked the Indian in the bowels, recovering instantly his former position. Then throwing his whole weight in a powerful lunge forward, he still guided the course of his red foe. All this transpired in a moment. The next, the head of the Comanche dashed with force against the limb, tearing the very scalp in places from his skull, causing the Indian to close his eyes, quiver from head to foot, and for an instant to relax his grip on the wrist of his white antagonist.

Wrenching his knife-band free, Sharp Eye raised the same above the waters, and then drove the glittering steel to the hilt in the paint-daubed breast of the savage. Then, as the warrior opened his mouth to give the death yell, the young scout thrust him beneath the water, which was now dyed with his blood, and a gurgling, horrible sound issued from it as the Comanche sank, struggling in his death-agony.

Grasping the friendly branch with one hand, and holding the Indian under the water with the other, Sharp Eye gazed anxiously up and along the north bank, meanwhile panting with exertion.

With a cry of intense joy and relief, Maggie lashed the horses abreast of the point where the desperate water combat had come to an end, and the young scout waved his hand in exultation and victory, as he permitted the dead brave to slide away with the current. He then swam ashore to rejoin the beautiful girl, who, though not engaged in the fight, had probably suffered more horror and anxiety than she would have been in the position of her lover.

"Come quick, Maggie! Follow me in-

stantly!" cried out Sharp Eye. "We must ford the stream and take a look over the south plain. I fear the Comanche war-party is close at hand."

Without a word, Maggie followed her lover over the stream, the latter climbing a tall tree on the outer edge of the timber.

"The red devils are coming!" he exclaimed. "I see them plainly. They are pointed for the San Miguel."

Quickly descending, the young Texan sprung into his saddle, his face filled with anxiety.

"Maggie, my darling," he said, "we must gallop like the wind. There is blood, torture, death and worse flying down on the western breeze!"

"How many of the red fiends are there, Ed?" Maggie asked at length, as she urged her horse close to the one ridden by her lover, whose mind was so filled with thoughts bearing on the situation, that he seemed scarcely to be aware of the presence that was so dear to him.

"I should judge there are three score of them, Maggie; and, had you seen them, you would be eager to fly toward the Medina. You will go there with me now, will you not?"

"Ed, I will not leave the San Miguel! There are many hiding-places near, and at our cabin, and you can ride on much faster without me. You will probably meet your friends before you reach the Medina, and you can also inform Wild Wolf that we are in danger, and need his assistance. You said he was at the ford. If so, he can get word to his braves in a short time. I don't think I should have the least fear or anxiety, if he and Big Foot Wallace were at the ranch."

"Can it be possible, Maggie, that you are resolved to stay at the ranch while I am away?"

"Certainly I am. I can hide away very easily."

"But the merciless devils may find you out, for all that."

"If they come before you return, which I much doubt, they will conclude that all the whites have left the vicinity, and will waste it searching."

"That is reasonable, I admit, Maggie; but I hesitate about leaving you, all the same. It seems to me that the fright you experienced up the stream, when you had but one Comanche before your eyes, has been very soon forgotten."

"Why, Ed, my fright was not on my own account, but yours. If that Indian had killed you, I would have faced the war-party on the plain alone!"

Sharp Eye, as he looked at the lovely girl by his side, felt, by the expression of her face, and his knowledge of her character, that she spoke the truth. Upon thinking over her decision, he decided that it would probably be safe for her to remain, and that he could, as she had said, proceed on his mission with greater speed if he went alone. He knew besides that, in the way of the Comanches was the ranch of a Texan, who, on seeing the war-party, would without doubt hasten downstream for help, in which event he would stay with Maggie until the arrival of the scouts. If the Indians did discover the ranch, it would delay them at least a day; so Sharp Eye, finding it useless to try and persuade Maggie, contented himself with this reasoning, and galloped off toward the Medina, at headlong speed.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ATTACK ON THE RANCH.

The cabin of Post Oak Bill was situated in a small natural opening within the bottom timber, shielded from view on all sides; the rippling waters of the San Miguel being audible from the wide veranda, although the stream was hidden from sight by a narrow belt of timber and dense undergrowth.

Towering some eighty feet above the ground, near a herder's hut at the corral in a little opening, further up-stream, was a gigantic oak, its branches literally covered by long festoons of Spanish moss. Huge grape-vines also wound about and amid the limbs, forming, by their natural network, an arbor shut in from the sun. Two-thirds up this tree, Maggie Moore had once, in her wild and reckless way, climbed to gain a view of the plain; and, finding there such a cosey nest, had prevailed upon Juan, one of the *vaqueros*, to construct some ladders of raw hide, commencing at a point

which could not be seen from below. This was easy of access, and Maggie soon learned to reach the "nest" without much exertion.

Juan and Antonio, the herders, were absent on the prairie when Sharp Eye and Maggie galloped up to the ranch, but the young scout avowed his intention of sending them back, to remain there until his return.

Maggie, refusing all assistance from her lover, and bidding him start immediately, carried a pair of blankets and some food up to her arbor in the tree, not forgetting a small rifle and a brace of revolvers, recently presented to her by Sharp Eye.

Looking out over the plain to the north, as soon as she had completed her arrangements, the maiden saw her lover speeding like the wind toward the Medina, and also discovered Juan and Antonio galloping toward the ranch, they having been warned by the young scout of the danger that was hovering over their home, and the necessity of their holding the cabin, should the Indians attack it, until he should return with their employer, and such other assistance as he might be able to procure.

Descending to the ground as the Mexicans arrived at the ranch, Maggie furnished them with plenty of ammunition, and then securely fastening the oaken window-shutters and the rear entrance to the dwelling, she stationed Juan at the front door, and directed Antonio to scout about the corrals, and at times to cross the river, and ascertain if the Indians were within view along the line of timber.

Directing the two men to enter the cabin at nightfall, or at any time when they were suspicious of danger, and bar the door, as also to defend the dwelling to the best of their ability in case of an attack, Maggie again ascended to her perch, glanced quickly from the north and south lookouts without discovering anything of interest or danger. Then she selected a favorite volume of poems, threw herself into her hammock, and began to read as if nothing had occurred to interrupt the even tenor of her mind; indeed she was surprised herself at her unconcern under the possible dangers that threatened her.

However, situated as she was, she knew that, with her rifle and revolvers, she could defend herself successfully against a dozen Comanches, should such a number attempt to climb up the oak, as she would have every advantage.

The previous night, Maggie had not retired until a late hour, as she had been conversing with her lover; and now, it was not half an hour after she had opened her book before she fell asleep. When she awoke the sun was just sinking in the west.

In surprise the young girl gazed out over the plain to the south, in the direction of the Frio, and uttered a stifled cry as she did so; for, not half a mile from the timber of the San Miguel, and riding parallel with it, were a score of Comanches.

The Indians were using their quirts without mercy, and their mustangs were flying over the grass at break-neck speed. It was a fearful sight to look upon, but it was some consolation to Maggie to know that the war-party had been weakened by the departure of those braves, and also that they were apparently ignorant of the location of the cabin.

As these warriors passed from view to the east, Maggie, although she knew that Sharp Eye had not had time to reach the Medina and return, gazed out over the north plain, when again her face blanched as she discovered three Indians in hot pursuit of one of Post Oak Bill's herds of horses. She knew that the animals, if they possibly could evade the Comanches, would gallop directly to the corrals, and then the hostiles would discover the ranch. She soon saw that her fears would be verified, and she quickly descended the tree, ran to the cabin, and, after explaining the situation to Juan and Antonio, bade them secrete themselves near the corrals, and kill the three Indians if possible; for in that way only could they hope to save the ranch and their own lives.

The faithful Mexicans at once started for the corrals, and Maggie soon heard the dull rumble like thunder, as the horses, in a wild stampede, entered the hard-beaten corrals. After this there was an occasional din, caused by the animals rushing about the inclosures, proving to the anxious girl that the gates had been secured, and in a short time Juan and Antonio came running toward the cabin.

"Well, my brave boys," said Maggie, "what success?"

"*Los Comanches no steal el caballos,*" said Antonio.

"What have you done? Tell me, Antonio!"

"Hide in bush. Throw ropes quick," was the reply.

"And the three Indians—where are they?"

"Gone to *jornada del muerto*," said Juan.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Maggie. "You are brave boys, but I feared that one of the red fiends would escape, and if so, he would have brought down the whole band upon us. Do you think we will be safe now from attack during the night?"

"Braves no go back. Other braves go see where gone. Best for senorita go up tree."

"I will do as you advise, Juan," said Maggie.

"I saw about twenty Comanches galloping down the river on the south side not long since. If we can hold out until the morning, we will then, I hope, be in a position to defend the ranch."

"Plenty Comanches on San Miguel," said Antonio.

With a shudder Maggie returned to her nest in the tree. She saw the two Mexicans enter the cabin, and in the stillness of night heard the heavy bars fall into place; then all was silent. Hour after hour passed, each seeming to be the length of a night, when suddenly the maiden's heart sprung to her throat, and a cry to her lips; for the bright flash and sharp reports of two rifles came from the loop-holes in the cabin. The flash revealed to the terrified girl two score of war-painted Comanches, weapons in hand, all cautiously approaching the opening. Soon their war-whoop burst on the air, as the reports of the rifles echoed through the natural arches, beneath which flowed the dark waters of the San Miguel.

Close following the reports of the guns fired by the Mexicans, came a rapid fusilade of revolver shots from the same source, followed by vengeful cries, which caused the terrified girl to shudder, and grasp a limb of the tree for support.

For a time all was now silent except the groans of the wounded, and the weird death-chants of the dying; these proving that Juan and Antonio had aimed their rifles well. The cessation of all sounds of conflict indicated that the Indians had drawn off to concoct some plan of assault, which would point toward the capture of the cabin and its inmates.

For a few minutes nothing was to be seen, but soon the hut of one of the herders, almost directly beneath the large oak, burst into a blaze, and dense clouds of smoke began to arise from it.

Providentially, a light breeze from the west blew the smoke into the timber below, otherwise the poor girl would have been in danger of suffocation; but it opened out a scene that was truly fearful.

Nearly all the Comanches were standing behind trees, or perched in the undergrowth, but some half-a-dozen were crawling like snakes in the low shrubbery at the rear of the cabin. The bake-oven was about twenty feet from the back door of the dwelling, and near it were a number of large stones, which had been left when the oven was constructed, and had not been removed.

As the creeping savages reached the vicinity of these stones, one of their number gave a peculiar signal, and immediately several braves rushed from their hiding-places on the opposite side of the dwelling.

A mixed volley of arrows and bullets was now fired at the front entrance, in order to draw the attention of the defenders from the rear loop-holes.

That this movement was successful, was proved by the sharp reports of the rifles of Juan and Antonio, followed by the death-yells of two of the Indians.

This urged on the attacking party to greater fury. The skulking braves, in the rear of the cabin, each caught up a heavy rock, and rushed in single file toward the back door. When within three paces of it, the leader hurled his missile with great force against it, and then sprung aside, to give room to the one who followed; and so on, till the six warriors had all hurled these huge projectiles against one particular spot. They then threw themselves flat against the lower log of the cabin, to shield themselves from view at the loop-holes.

No door could stand such shocks. The middle plank was split, and the interior cross-pieces were knocked to the floor inside, making a complete wreck.

No sooner was the last rock hurled, and the effects of their efforts known to them, than the Indians gave an exulting whoop, which was the signal for a grand rush toward the ranch from all points; but Maggie knew in her own mind that the faithful Mexicans were at the breach, with weapons ready, to send the first red murderers who approached, to their doom. She was right.

As the whoops of the painted fiends broke on the ears of the two men, they located the spot where the lurking Comanches lay hidden; then, with rifles grasped, and fingers on the triggers, both dashed through the gap and toward the timber, shooting two braves dead that barred their way, and knocking two others senseless with their rifle barrels.

So unexpected was this movement to the Indians, that they stood for a full minute as if incapable of word or motion; but the next, the opening and the bottom rung with fiendish yells, and the whole war-party dashed in pursuit of the two Mexicans.

For a moment, all who saw the desperate run for life of Juan and Antonio, had little thought other than admiration for their desperate courage.

In the excitement of the moment, thinking only of the defenseless girl, whose many acts of kindness had won their esteem and regard, both Antonio and Juan rushed to the nearest point of cover, then down through the timber toward the burning but, losing sight of the fact that the blaze would reveal their presence to the enemy. Soon they climbed into the large oak, with the thought that they could reach Maggie Moore without being discovered. Throwing their now useless rifles aside, the *raqueros*, ran, as though the fiends of Hades were at their back, as indeed they were, or as bad.

To their consternation they now saw that the leaves of the tree had been burned to such an extent, that it could afford them no concealment.

The heated air and gasses almost suffocated the two men, but with set teeth, they strained their muscles to superhuman efforts, really believing that their young mistress must have perished in the flames. Not more than twenty feet from the lower branches, had they climbed, Antonio being above, when they were greeted with the vengeful yells of their pursuers, and a shower of arrows hurled around them. Juan shrieked out: "Madre de Dios," relinquished his hold, and fell to the earth. Antonio cast one glance of horror downward. Juan lay upon his back, near to the burning ruins of his hut, with half a dozen arrows projecting through his body, and feebly making the sign of the cross, while his eyes were filming in death.

Antonio, shuddering from head to feet, and expecting the same fate for himself, again sprung upward, and reached a point where the green foliage hid him from view. The next moment, with a cry of "Gracias a Dios," he fell prostrate into the elevated retreat where crouched his young mistress.

"Oh, Antonio!" exclaimed Maggie, "why did you come up here? You have made escape impossible for me now. But forgive me—I am almost crazed with the horrors of this night. Where is Juan?"

"My life-long *compadre* is dead," said the poor fellow. "El Diablo Comanches have killed him!"

Then, while the tears fell from the poor Mexican's eyes, he drew knife and revolver, braced himself, and stood as if determined to face death alone.

Maggie also, with weapons in hand, her face the hue of death, and a prayer on her lips, stood ready to shoot into the first painted face that broke through the foliage. However, the Indians had met with such heavy loss they prudently avoided showing themselves to one who had proved himself so daring and skillful; and a score of braves sprung into the surrounding trees, the branches of which were interlaced with the giant oak. Then, with cautious movements, they wormed themselves this way and that amid the vines and moss to positions of advantage near to Maggie and Antonio, who, although expecting to be discovered, were not aware, so stealthily had been their movements, that they were now surrounded and overlooked by the hideous fiends who glared upon them, taking care, however, not to reveal their presence by exposing even an arm beyond the outer screen of leaves that hid them. Maid and man, so strangely situated, stood listening intently, but hearing naught except

the throbbing of their own hearts and the slight flutter of leaves that met their ears. Then the horribly suggestive dragging of bodies along the rough branches proved to them that the crisis was at hand; that perhaps in another moment their hearts, which now beat so wildly, would be stilled forever.

It was indeed enough to cause the bravest man to quail; and both trembled at the approach of the unseen but deadly danger, against which they knew that they were powerless to combat. The burning but was now a smoldering mass of coals, and threw out a strange red light, which caused objects to assume unnatural shapes. The silence of the night, together with the distorting glow from beneath, was torture to Maggie, for she knew that the very air she breathed was pregnant with blood, torture and death—ay, worse than death at its worst!

But the dread silence and suspense was suddenly broken by a chorus of horrible yells of exultation, sounding all about them; then followed the whirr of a volley of arrows, and Antonio, with a cry of agony, sprung high in the air, and fell with a crash to join Juan in the *jornada del muerto*!

With a cry of horror Maggie cocked her revolver, but ere she could fire, a dozen warriors were about her, red arms encircled her, yells sounded in her ears, and then—God was merciful—she became unconscious.

CHAPTER XVI.

RIDING TO THE RESCUE.

It was midnight when Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill joined Sharp Eye on the south bank of the Medina, and all drove spurs, pointing their course southwest, toward the San Miguel, aiming to strike the stream at the ranch.

It required but a few words from Sharp Eye, shouted on the run, to explain the situation of affairs.

Big Foot Wallace said not a word, for he heard that the Comanches might cross the river, when they would be sure to notice the stock-paths, and by following them, discover the home of his pard.

The mind of the Giant Scout was racked with thoughts of the probable danger of Maggie Moore, who was considered by Big Foot to be but a child, and who was very dear to him also. Often had he tried to prevail upon Bill to send Maggie to San Antonio, where she could mingle with "kaliker-kivered humans," and be safe from marauding Indians and Greasers; and Bill himself had endeavored, more than once, to frighten her into the plan, but she loved the wild, free life at the ranch too well to leave the San Miguel.

The trio of scouts were all most dreadfully concerned by the probable danger which threatened the beautiful girl who ruled them with her wand of love, and not one could speak the word of consolation which he felt that he had no ground to offer. Spurring on, without mercy, the eyes of the three men soon became fixed on a far-off lurid glow, that spoke the worst. Grasping their rifles and tossing the barrels over the hollow of their left arms, they drove the torturing steel into the bleeding flanks of their steeds, that now made fresh efforts to obey the will of their masters.

They had but just cleared the belt of oaks, when, as they swept the plain with keen glance, they discovered four horsemen afar to the eastward, who appeared aiming to strike the San Miguel some twenty miles below the ranch of Post Oak Bill. Instantly, the latter and Big Foot Wallace thought of the four strangers they had met in the bar-room at San Antonio; but supposing they were at the Menger House, they were puzzled in regard to who the night riders might be, although forced to conclude that they must be some of the bandits under the notorious Capitan Caramba, who might be on a spying expedition. They thought it possible that the Mestizo might have communicated with them in regard to the presence of Colonel Bowen and his daughter, and if so, the latter were in great danger.

This, added to the anxiety of mind which already oppressed them, made the scouts less merciful in their treatment of the noble animals they rode, than they would otherwise have been. No men could be more considerate in regard to the kindly usage of their horses than were these scouts; but this was a time when all such regard was pitted against the life of a helpless maiden. With all this, they might be too late, but should such be the case,

they would, in the time to come, have the satisfaction of knowing that they did not spare their horses, when human life depended upon their speed.

On, on, over the prairie, grinding the ten thousand flowers into the dust, and throwing out afar the silvery dew drops from the bending grass.

On, like the rush of a norther, the swish of grass, the tramp of hoofs, the frequent snort, and the continuous panting of the steeds, being the only sounds that broke the night; the silvery moon smiling down in seeming mockery of the misery of these men, who might for aught they knew be now dashing into the midst of a hundred red-handed fiends, who would yell with delight and triumph as they tore the reeking scalps from the heads of their foes.

The blaze died down, the red glow blended with the darkness, until but a faint glimmer rose and fell to guide the scouts, who, as they neared the ranch, were filled with dread the most intense, as with eyes that burned like coals of fire, they gazed, the ominous silence seeming conclusive proof to them that they had come too late.

Each of the trio, as they cleared the undergrowth and entered the opening, halted as if paralyzed, for the silence of the grave ruled all in front of them.

One glance toward the giant oak, and all hope was gone, for the smoldering ruins of the herder's hut proved to all that Maggie Moore was not in the tree; that, if the smoke and heat had not killed her, she had been compelled by it to leave the tree, and thus place herself in the power of her foes.

Sharp Eye rushed up the oak like a madman.

"Bill," said Big Foot Wallace, sadly, "weuns he's roved too late, but don't wile. We'll rip up ther hull dang'd country from this terther Rockies, afore we'll give up leetle Maggie. Hit's a open warm trail ahead, an' a fair show fer comin' out O. K. I doesn't 'low ter close my peepers, nor chaw dried beef, until Maggie air es free es her own leetle birds on ther San Miguel!"

Post Oak Bill reversed his rifle, and bowed his head upon his hands which clasped the breech.

As Wallace ceased speaking, he considerately walked toward the cabin, leaving his pard to give vent to the anguish that racked him to the core. Big Foot had no sooner turned the corner of the dwelling, than he stopped short, and cried out in fury:

"Dog-gone ther cussed Comanches inter dangnation! Bill, jist h'ist yerself this-a-ways, an' I'll show you a sight that'll make yer chaw yer tongue half off with p'izen mad. Hyer's Juan an' Antonio strung up like butchered mav'ricks. Ther boyees stood ter ther posts, bet yer life; but I ain't a-goin' ter linger roun' hyer-a-ways. I'm off ter hunt up some fresh nags; then, ef I doesn't hump myself fer ha'r, on a solid jump clean through ther biz until I makes ther hull perrarer pirate outfit puke, I'm a dod-blasted out-an'-out pvervaricator!"

Post Oak Bill braced himself, and with a desperate and murderous look, walked rapidly to the front of his home. The doors were open, and many things that were useless to the Indians were scattered about. At this moment Sharp Eye came running in, crying out in a voice of despair:

"Maggie's gone, pard Bill! Maggie's gone! The red fiends have carried her off. I have been sick and faint, and almost hopeless, Bill; but now," raising his clinched fist, "my muscles are of steel, my will is iron, my brain is filled with such merciless madness toward the painted devils, that I feel I can scorn fatigue and hunger, and laugh all sleep to scorn while on the trail. We cannot spare time even to bury these poor defenders of Maggie and your home. Cut them down, Bill, and lay them in the smoke-house, while I go and assist Big Foot."

Post Oak Bill seemed utterly prostrated, and the horrid sight before him added to the tortures of his brain. Opposite the door of the cabin, with their heads downward, were hanging the mutilated bodies of the faithful Juan and Antonio.

The scalps of both had been torn from their heads, and the Comanches had given vent to the hate and fury, caused by the death of their fellow warriors, by mutilating the bodies of those brave and faithful men.

Only for an instant did Bill gaze at the hor-

rible sight; then he laid down his rifle, and rose erect, setting his teeth firmly, and with an effort controlling himself. His momentary weakness was now past, woe to any Comanche brave who stood in his path. Nothing but a satiety of revenge could bring the scout of San Miguel back to his free and easy, gay and happy self.

Tenderly he cut Juan and Antonio loose, and laid the corpses on the green sward; then going into his once neat and tidy dwelling, he secured two blankets from a closet, and wrapping one of the bodies in each, he carried them to the smoke-house, and laid them side by side on the floor.

At this moment Big Foot Wallace and Sharp Eye came galloping up from the corral, each mounted upon a fresh and fiery steed.

"Hyer wo air, pard Bill," said the Giant Scout; "an' we hes foun' some nags what An-tonie an' Juan larnter ter trees in ther bot-ton. Giner'ly speakin' I don't count hefty on a Greaser, but I'm a snake-eatin' Piute of our boyees warn't slam-up XXX white men, from ther ha'r ter ther toe nails!"

"You are right," said Sharp Eye; "but we must be off on the trail. Think of poor Mag-gie!"

"Hold yer mustang," replied Big Foot; "I hain't had time ter think. I'll gi'n yer a show ter plant leal inter red meat soon, so don't yer fret. I knowz ther snake-eyed, dog-eatin' scariifers clean through, an' I'm a-gamblin' heavy they doesn't git ther bestest o' a man what chaws ther bark offen an acre o' post every mornin' jist ter git up a appetite."

Fast Oak Bill beckoned the two men now, to come to his side, and pointed to the blistered hands of the Mexicans.

"Wa-al, dod-blast my ole skin," exclaimed Wallace; "ef I doesn't sot some kind of a moniment over 'em! Arter they hed sent all ther re's they could ter grass, they dusted ter perfect Maggie, an' hed ter climb ther burnin' bark to do hit! But, pards, I'm kinder in clernated ter think that we-uns hes a hefty ole he job ahead o' us, an' hit's gut ter be did on the wings o' chain-lightnin'!"

As Big Foot spoke, he began changing the equipments of his jaded horse to the one he had just brought up, and his companions were not slow in following his example. A slight examination of the surrounding paths was sufficient to put them upon the right trail. The Comanches had gone down country.

Spurring on in the lead, the Giant Scout at times dismounting to examine the "sign," all proceeded toward revenge, and the rescue of Maggie Moore; hoping that Wild Wolf, who had left them to gallop northwest over the plain, and hasten his braves on the war-path, would make his appearance in time to do good service.

CHAPTER XVII.

AGAIN TAKEN CAPTIVE.

THE score of Comanches who had been observed by Maggie from the oak, the evening previous to the attack on the ranch, galloped over the prairie to the eastward; but before they had proceeded ten miles they crossed the river, when they were brought to a halt by an ejaculation of surprise from the leading chief.

Checking their half-wild ponies on the margin of the bottom, their black eyes glittered with the prospect of a fight, for they saw a long scattering line of horsemen approaching the timber, and about to enter the same at a horse-shoe bend, a half mile below.

They soon perceived that the night-riders were heavily armed, and too strong in numbers for them to attack; and, as they continued to sweep the plains, they also discovered, afar off on the prairie, a wagon which was following, and probably belonged to the party who were riding from the east.

With a quick, guttural order, the chief of this little band of war-painted Indians whirled his horse, and re-crossed the stream, followed by his braves, and rode down the San Miguel, shielded from the view of the night riders, by the bottom timber.

Scouts were sent on foot to inspect the camp in the bend and all waited in the dense shades until the return of their spies, with information in regard to the encampment. The chief then dispatched one of his braves on the back trail, to the main war-party, with the intelligence gained; then, with his warriors, he again went dashing down the Miguel on the south side,

for some miles, when, fording the stream, they passed through the timber, galloping over the north plain.

When Colonel Bowen assisted Belle and Rosa from the wagon, they all crawled on their hands and knees toward the dark line of timber which marked the course of the San Miguel, knowing that within the thick undergrowth they could conceal themselves with some hope of safety.

But the river was a long distance away, and often were the poor fugitives forced to halt, crouched together and rest, their hands bleeding from contact with the sharp blades of wire-grass, which, although seeming a soft verdant carpet, cut the flesh like so many tiny knives.

Colonel Bowen was now upon the rack, in his anguish of mind; vividly realizing, as he now did, that he had brought his fair child from a happy home, in which she was surrounded with all the luxury that a refined mind could crave, and dragged her to these border wilds amid savage and lawless men, where danger in some of its worst forms had already come to her. He strove to forget that but now, she had been bound like a slave, but the humiliating fact hovered continually before his tortured mind.

But through it all, Belle Bowen was her own bright self; and, by forced cheerfulness and words of hope, strove to instill into her father and Rosa, courage to go on.

The moon smiled brightly down upon their misery, seeming in league with their foes; for, had darkness fallen upon the earth, they could have risen to their feet and in a short time have reached the safe shelter of the dense thickets in the bottom timber of the San Miguel.

As it was, they dared not stand erect, for fear of being seen by some of the bandits; who might, at any moment perceive that the mules were traveling an irregular course, without guidance; and then, when they found that the driver was dead, and the captives gone, gallop on the back trail, beating the grass to find them.

At times, however, Belle would elevate her queenly head, and peer toward the west. Then she would see, afar off, the white top of the wagon, and shudder as she thought of the dead man who held the reins, while she thanked God that they were free, although suffering as they were.

The poor fugitive had passed half the distance between the point where they had left the wagon and the timber of the San Miguel, when Belle caught sight of some moving objects issuing from the timber, and she trembled violently as she realized that they were horsemen.

The colonel and Rosa were lying upon the ground, in order to relieve their limbs from the fatigue caused by the unnatural position they had been compelled to assume in crawling over the ground.

As Belle gazed fixedly for a few moments in the direction of the horsemen, being reluctant to alarm her father, she began to perceive the character of the new danger that threatened, and her blood froze, while she almost gasped for breath; for, on like the wind toward them galloped a score of Indians upon their half-wild steeds, their long hair flying in the bright moonlight.

The appalled girl gave out a choking, gasping sound, in an endeavor to speak, and burst out, in a hoarse, unnatural voice:

"Father in Heaven, protect Thy helpless children!"

Colonel Bowen raised himself to a sitting posture, and glanced in alarm at his daughter. Then, guided by her fixed eyes, he looked southward.

"Great God, forgive me for dragging my child into such a country! Belle, my darling, our time has come. We are lost, we are lost!"

No sooner had the colonel spoken, than Belle recovered herself, and desperate daring was stamped upon every line of her features.

"Father, you fought Indians in Florida. Don't be so hopeless and despairing, but let us fight to the last. Quick! Crawl to the east. They have not discovered us yet, and if they do, I will shoot one of them, if you are not firm enough to point the rifle."

"I have the gun, and I will use it," said the old man. "I will defend you to the death, my child. Feeble as I am, I feel the strength of a dozen men providentially given me. But death is preferable to the tortures of both mind

and body that we had to endure since leaving the Medina. Again, I pray most earnestly that I may be forgiven my selfish act in bringing you here. Belle, if your life be spared, remember me kindly, for I have striven to make you happy. This last unlucky move, though I was actuated by selfish motives, I most truly thought would be for your comfort, releasing you from the persecution of that unprincipled wretch, Frank Ames."

While Colonel Bowen was speaking, they had all three been crawling stealthily to the southward; but their guardian angels had evidently been taking a night off, for, although they had not been seen by the Indians, the latter, as if guided by a fiendish enemy, swerved from the course they had been traveling, directly toward the crouching fugitives. The panting steeds were now close upon them, and fearful of being maimed, or crushed to death, all three arose to their feet. As they did so, the hot breath of the horses fanned their cheeks, as the animals sprung in affright to the right and left.

The colonel sprung with his rifle directly in front of his daughter and Rosa, and leveled the weapon; but suddenly Belle realized that if he killed an Indian he would be brained before her eyes, or if not, that their chance of escape would be much lessened, and with the quickness of thought she caught the gun and thrust its muzzle to the earth, at the very moment that her father had pulled the trigger.

"Father, you would have been killed before my eyes," cried Belle. "if you had shot one of those vengeful braves. We were insane to think of defending ourselves against such a horde. Let me have the rifle, and allow me to act as my judgment prompts. We may even yet escape."

Belle spoke these words in a rapid, nervous manner, and the colonel made no effort to retain the weapon, which she took, and advancing fearlessly to one of the Comanches, whom, by his dress she took to be the chief, she passed the rifle into his hands. This act was followed by "Ughs" and "Waughs" from the circular mass of braves who witnessed it.

The young girl then returned, and clasped the neck of her father, while the terrified Rosa clung to the colonel on the other side, thus forming a tableau of brilliant beauty, and helpless daring, and proud, grand old age.

It was a sight that, for the moment, drew the admiration of even the merciless Comanches; the knocking down of the rifle, and thus saving the life of one of their number, impressing them greatly.

The chief, however, issued his orders in a rapid manner, which were at once obeyed by three warriors springing to the earth, and tossing the jaw-straps of their horses to three of their fellow braves. This done, the dismounted Comanches tightened their belts, and then rapidly over the trail by which they had come, toward the bottom timber of the San Miguel.

Other warriors then quickly bound the hands of the captives, assisted them to mount the horses which the riders had given up, and then secured them to the peculiar saddles used by the Comanche tribe—being somewhat similar to the Government pack-saddle, except much smaller, and having a wide strap of buffalo-skin extending from horn to cantle, and upon which the rider sits. This done, all whirled their mustangs, those to which the captives were bound being led by the three Indians, and then sped on the back trail toward the river; for the chief was too cunning to risk being caught on the plain, with his small force, by the desperate and well-armed Texans and Mexicans who were encamped further up, and who, he felt sure, had heard the report of the rifle fired by the old man they had captured.

It required but a little thought on the part of the chief to decide that those he had found on the plain, without horses, and seeking concealment, had escaped from the wagon which he had seen, and that the men encamped above would, when they ascertained that their captives were gone, connect the report of the rifle with the latter, and hasten in the direction whence the sound had proceeded.

Hence he urged his braves and captives with all speed to cover, although he felt sure they had been observed by the four men who had before been noticed galloping from the north, and now were within half a mile of the camp at the bend, as was also the wagon; but both approaching the same from different directions.

The captives, especially Belle, being on the alert and watchful, had also observed these four horsemen. Belle, at first, thought that George Adler might be one of the number, he having, perhaps, engaged others to accompany him; but when she reflected that they were proceeding directly toward the point at which she had decided the bandits were encamped, she knew, or at least felt sure, that her lover could not be one of the quartette; if so, he was riding to his doom.

Then, suddenly, she recalled the words of the bandit chief, and she became positive in her mind that the four night riders were Frank Ames and some of his lawless associates, who were on their way to the camp of the bandits, expecting to find her there, and force her into a marriage with him, which the outlaw chief had spoken of as the arrangement between them.

Although bound and helpless, and in the power of blood-craving savages, and with no well-based hope of release, Belle Bowen felt some consolation from the consciousness of having escaped being forced into a marriage with Frank Ames, who had been the direct means of launching them all into a sea of misery, suffering, torture, and death—or perhaps, for herself and Rosa, a fate ten thousand times worse than death.

The attention of both the Comanches and their captives was directed up-stream, that being the point from which both parties were apprehensive of danger; but if as they approached the dark shades of the San Miguel, amid which was concealment, perhaps safety; if, at this time, red marauders or white prisoners had cast a glance down-stream to the east, they would have seen a strange and perplexing sight plainly outlined in the moonlight—a sight that would have filled the hopeless heart of Belle Bowen with joy, and would have drawn from her lips a prayer of the most earnest, heartfelt gratitude.

That sight, upon the moonlit plain, was made up of two human beings, both mounted upon prancing steeds, which they skillfully managed. The one was a squaw, young and handsome, her costume glittering with thousands of beads; the other was a young Texan, his face pale as death, and desperation flashing from his eyes as he strove to break from the iron grasp of the Indian woman, and dash to the rescue of the lovely maiden who ruled his heart and soul, and whom he now saw bound, and in the power of the merciless Comanches.

These two were George Adler, or Water Warrior, and Warnona, the squaw of Wild Wolf, the Waco.

CHAPTER XVII. WOMAN'S WISDOM.

AFTER Warnona had asserted that the horseman who galloped southward from the Rio Medina was the Mestizo, George Adler sat his horse for a moment, wrapped in deep thought. Then he asked quickly:

"How do you know that it is the half-breed?"

"Hold his hand in air," was the squaw's reply. "The bullet of Wild Wolf has cut off his fingers."

"That is very good proof that he is the man you mention; but I could not detect at such a distance that he held his hand in that position. Warnona's eyes are keen as the eyes of an eagle."

"Warnona has played on the prairies and lived in the woods since the Great Spirit gave her strength to walk," said the squaw, evidently pleased at the compliment. "She can point at a flower-sucker (bumming bird) across the Medina, when her white brother might say it was a fly. When the bee flies home to his hollow tree, he darts like the lightnings of the Great Spirit, but he escapes not the eye of Warnona."

"I can readily believe you, my red sister; but where have the wagons gone? The Mestizo is not riding in pursuit of them, I hope."

"Come. Trail point down Medina. The friends of my white brother were afraid. They go not straight to prairie."

Urging her horse down the stream, the beautiful squaw, with her form bent toward the earth, kept on at a rate that was little more than a fast walk, easily following the wagon-trails where the tall bunch-grass had been crushed down.

George Adler followed close after, filled with great anxiety in regard to the departure

of the half-breed, and regretting that Wild Wolf had not put a bullet through the miscreant's heart. He had now no doubt that the Mestizo was connected with the band of Capitan Caramba, and that the latter had, through spies, communicated with Frank Ames. He also felt sure that the half-breed had been employed to kill him, but he was greatly puzzled as to how the bandit chief had become possessed of so much information in regard to the Bowens and himself; unless, indeed, Frank Ames had known of the departure of all at the very time they left the Trinity.

However, it was plain that the Bowens were in great danger, and that the cutlaw chief was leagued with Ames for no other purpose than to bring about a marriage between the latter and Belle; although there was no doubt that Capitan Caramba had in view a liberal compensation for his services. Although George knew that Colonel Bowen intended to purchase land and stock, he had no idea of the amount of money which the latter had taken with him from the Trinity.

Reasoning in this strain, the young man began to feel positive that no bodily injury was intended to either the colonel or his daughter; but there could be no worse fate imaginable than for his darling to be linked for life to such an unprincipled rascal as was Frank Ames, and George resolved that he would save her at the risk of his life. In fact, he feared that he would become so enraged if he discovered that Belle was in the power of the bandits, that he would be imprudent and throw caution to the winds, thereby losing all chances of assisting his promised wife in her great need and extremity.

Since Warnona had decided that the fast galloped horseman was the wounded Mestizo, who had upon three occasions attempted his life, George was positive that the half-breed was now hastening to report to Capitan Caramba the presence of the Bowens south of the Medina, and also of himself, in order that the bandit could take action with a view of capturing all hands.

Without a word, our young friend followed close after Warnona, thankful from his inmost heart that he had met the Waco chief, and that his brave squaw had volunteered to accompany him, otherwise he might have gone astray on the trail.

It did seem as though the fates were against all who were his friends, and favored those who were bent upon dastard deeds; for, when he had counted upon the assistance of Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill, as well as that of Wild Wolf, all three had been called from his side by their own most urgent affairs. The Wacos would, without doubt, be brought in contact with the Comanches, which would leave Capitan Caramba to act his part, without let or hindrance.

The exciting scenes and dangers through which the young man had passed since he arrived in San Antonio, together with loss of sleep, and the severe contusion he had received on the head, when hurled from his horse, all tended to discourage and enervate him, and the departure of the scouts and Wild Wolf had well-nigh caused him to despair, but the brisk walk of his horse along the border of the cool shades of the Medina bottom timber revived him, and when Warnona turned abruptly south, away from the river, and passed through the belt of scattering mesquites, he braced himself, feeling sure that by daylight they would reach a point where the wagons could be seen—perhaps encamped where he could get an opportunity to speak with his darling, and inform her of the dangers that threatened her on all sides.

For some time George and Warnona maintained the same rate of speed and distance apart, without exchanging a word; then they broke for the mesquites, and pushed out boldly upon the trail, which was easily followed upon the moonlit plain. When they came near to the motte, they could see, far off to the southwest, the heads of a number of horsemen bobbing up and down, and beyond these the white tilt of a wagon.

As George Adler caught sight of this discouraging view, he drew rein quickly, and grew faint as death, for he felt that he had come too late; that the Bowens were in the power of the bandits, although it was impossible that the half-breed could have communicated the movements of the wagons to Capitan Caramba and his band.

While looking after them with a fixed stare,

Warnona called to him from the trail toward the motte, and he at once rode up to her side, observing, as he did so, a slight smoke which arose from a bed of dying embers.

The evidence now before his eyes was conclusive. The iron work of a wagon lay among the ashes, proving plainly that the Bowens were taken.

"The friends of my white brother are gone. Bad white men and bad Mexican take them over the plain to the San Miguel. What will Water Warrior do?"

Thus spoke Warnona, watching George's face as she did so.

"I shall follow them even to the ends of the earth," was the answer, in a hoarse but determined tone.

"My white brother cannot fight a war-party alone," said the young squaw, sadly.

"I can crawl into the camp, and make an effort to save them, even if I am killed in the attempt."

"Water Warrior is a great brave, but his legs or his horse would carry him too fast among his enemies. He must be sly as a fox, and Warnona will help him to get his squaw away."

"I do thank you, my red sister. I need help now, if ever; but there are those in yon wagon who now shed tears of sorrow at the thoughts of their condition. They must be saved, if possible!"

"Black people are not in wagons," said Warnona.

"If the negroes are not in that wagon, where are they?" asked the young man in surprise.

Warnona guided her horse to the north side of the motte, George following her, and pointed inward to a small clear spot, not ten feet from them.

"Merciful God!" he exclaimed in horror. "The dastardly wretches have murdered the poor negroes. Great Heaven! My darling is in the power of brutes far worse than the savages of the Pecos. Come, Warnona! We'll trail them to their lair. Then we will gallop with the speed of the wind to Post Oak Bill's ranch. We must have help. Colonel Bowen and my darling shall be saved, if I have to wade through blood, and fly through fire. Come Warnona, we must follow them!"

Driving spurs to his horse, George Adler, his face drawn with anguish, his eyes blazing with insane fury, dashed off at full speed toward the point where he had last seen the heads of the horsemen. Warnona, knowing it would be worse than useless to reason with him, followed close in the rear, her long hair flying wild, her black eyes blazing with the war-spirit of her people, brought forward by the distress of one she had but just met for the first time, but who was the friend of Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill. This, with the indorsement of Wild Wolf was enough to cause her to risk her life in his service. So, on she dashed, a very Queen of Nature, in the full glare of the yellow moon, and disdaining any concealment from lurking foes on either hand.

On, on flew the death pale man, and close followed the red beauty, sweeping the plain ahead with her eagle glance, their horses panting with exertion, and the white foam flying from the prairie grass and flowers!

Why had they not been sooner? Why had they lingered at the motte? Why was it that but a few fleeting moments, a few bounds of their steeds, were all that was required to save the three human beings crouching among the prairie grass? So, the red demons surrounded them; and Belle Bowen, within sight of her lover, now struggling with the more prudent and rational Warnona to rush to her rescue, was urged forward, with her father and her faithful maid, into the dark shades of the San Miguel, in the company of fiendish, paint-daubed Comanches, whose hands had been often bathed in the innocent blood of helpless women and babes.

As the Indians and their captives became swallowed up in the dense undergrowth it seemed to George Adler that they had gone from his sight forever; and, with a despairing cry, he again strove to urge his horse forward on the trail, but Warnona, who had discovered the Indians first, had secretly slipped an extra jaw-strap into the mouth of his mustang, attaching the other end of it securely to her own saddle-horn, well knowing what the young man would attempt to do, and then, when the critical moment arrived, she had easily prevented the animal from obeying the spur of Water Warrior. A fierce struggle ensued, for George,

upon finding he could not control his steed, endeavored to leap from his saddle, his object being to run on foot, and alone to save the idol of his heart.

"Is Water Warr or a child? Is my white brother a fool that he would hold his head down for a Comanche to scalp? Listen to Warnona! The white squaw shall not burn at the torture stake. She shall not sweep the lodge of a Comanche. My white brother shall walk with his squaw among the log lodges of his people; but he must listen to the words of Warnona."

As the young squaw said this, George calmed down, but his mind was still in a most demoralized condition. He had been riding with his head bent down, and watching the plain; and had not observed the Indians. They, likewise, being engaged in watching the plain in the direction of the bandit camp had not observed the white man and the squaw. So, when they had surrounded their strangely secured captives, they paid no notice to aught else, except to glance up the stream toward the only point from which they felt they had any need to dread danger to themselves.

"Come," said Warnona; "Water Warrior must wet his head in the river, and the mustangs must drink. The trail of the Comanches may lead to Rio Frio."

George Adler lifted his sombrero, and placed his hand upon his bruised head. His hair was thickly saturated with blood, and he knew the flow must be stopped, or he would not be able to travel. His brain seemed like molten lead, strange fancies and depressing feelings causing him much concern in regard to his strength of mind and being equal to the requirements of the occasion.

He had lost a large amount of blood, while lying at the foot of the tree on the Medina, against which he had been thrown; and he realized the necessity of applying cool water, and bandaging the wound. He therefore submitted himself to the guidance of the Waco squaw who led him into the bottom timber, some three thousand yards above the place where the red marauders had disappeared with their captives.

She then left Water Warrior to bathe and bandage his head; and then, securing her horse, Warnona stole through the dark timber to gain intelligence of the movements of both the Indians and the bandits.

CHAPTER XIX.

ROGUES FALLING OUT.

THE bend in the San Miguel, toward which the wagon and the bandits under Capitan Caramba were headed, was a position admirably chosen for defense; at this point it was a matter of impossibility to ford the stream.

At the neck of the bend, which was narrow, and very easily guarded, a path had been dug away, in order to procure water for cooking, and to lead the animals, one at a time, to drink.

A few rough cabins of logs, which were green, proving that the same were of recent construction, were located in the edge of the timber, which hid from view the southern end or swell of the bend, the middle of the same being clear of tree or bush.

Previous to the arrival of the main part of the band, who had waylaid the wagons, there were half a score of brutal-visaged, desperate-looking men, engaged in cooking, and in cleaning arms; while at the neck of the bend, a sentinel sat upon a log of deadwood, with rifle in hand, scanning the plain.

Half of these men were whites, of the most depraved and reckless character, and the remainder were Mexicans of the Rio Grande, the most lawless, cowardly, and cruel set of men on the American continent, assassins by trade, bandits by nature.

The cabins were well furnished with spoils taken from ranches in their numerous raids; although it was evident that they had but recently established themselves, and for the time being only, at this point, it being a position which they could not hope to maintain, being so near the settled portion of the Medina and San Miguel. A large number of horses of various brands were lariated to the grass in the natural opening, plainly proving the character of the camp.

As the sentinel arose to his feet, with a yell of pleased surprise, when he caught sight of the returning members of the band, and the wagon in the distance, each man left his occu-

pation, and rushed out for a view of the plain to the east.

"Dang'd ef Capitan Caramba hain't made a ten strike this trip!" exclaimed one burly scoundrel. "He's corralled some horses an' mules, an' a wagon, an' I reckon that's somethin' in hit, er he wouldn't be skutin' back quite so speedy."

"Thet's the Cap, all over," agreed another. "Thar ain't no soot soldier 'bout him, an' he'd 'a' gone cl'ar through ter San Antone, afore he'd 'a' come back without his freight. Hyer he comes, jist a-b'ilin', an' he looks es though somethin' hed struck him—struck hard at that."

Capitan Caramba galloped at full speed past the sentinel, his followers looking on in admiration.

"Vira, *muchachitos!* Hurrah, boys!" he yelled. "We've struck a rich streak! Fifty thousand in *oro*, besides provisions, blankets, ammunition, mules, and horses, and the handsomest girl in Texas, a captive. We've got her father, as well, who'll be forced to shell out heavy before we'll allow him to scoot toward civilization. However, we've lost two men, Big Jim and Garcia, both shot by the beauty, Belle of the Brazos! You better believe she's got grit."

Wild cries burst from the lips of the brutal horde, their rage at the death of their comrades being appeased by thoughts of the gold, the distribution of which would enable them to gratify their one great passion—gambling at their favorite game, *monte*.

"Boys," continued the captain, as he gracefully dismounted, "this girl is the one I've been promised a large sum to capture, but I've taken a fancy to her myself, for she not only is a beauty, but a regular devil when aroused. In fact, she is just the girl for a prairie rover's wife. Hello! What's up with that Mestizo? I forgot to say that we owe our luck to him, and that the scouts and citizens hung Miguel in San Antonio. Our spy has got his hand shot to pieces, and you see it hasn't improved his temper. He is boiling over with fury."

The Mestizo came dashing from the plain, with his mutilated hand uplifted, and yelling like a fiend, as he waved his arm toward the north.

All now cast quick glances in the direction indicated, and discovered four horsemen approaching at a gallop. The alarm became general.

"Who are those men?" demanded the bandit chief.

"Senor Ames," was the reply of the half-breed.

"Aha!" exclaimed Caramba. "Frank is eager for his bride, but as he has been too late to take a hand in the fight, I think I shall have to disappoint him. He has pards enough, some of the old Brazos boys, I reckon, and I propose to ring them all into some scrape that will prevent them from returning to flip cards and suck champagne down country. Cook some grub, boys, for we are all hungry as bears."

Four of the Mexicans hastened back to the camp-fires to obey their chief, who stood leaning against the shoulder of his horse, his arm over the saddle, and a proud, triumphant look upon his face, mingled with something of contempt and disdain, as he watched the approaching horsemen, who, if they noticed the wagon, did not for a moment suppose that it was the vehicle of the Bowens, as there was but one team to be seen on the plain.

"*Curajo!*" yelled the Mestizo, furiously, grinding his teeth together, as he slid from his saddle and held his mutilated hand in the air. "Senor Adler shall die the death of a dog! I will laugh in his eyes, I will spit in his face, when I cut out his heart!"

"I judge," said the outlaw chief, "that George Adler is a hard man to kill, Ignacio. He has got the best of you every time, and I advise you to steer clear of him. You can't do much with one hand. I reckon he will give us trouble yet. If he knew who Capitan Caramba was, he would be mighty apt to put a ball through me. Did you say he was with a Waco Indian?"

"*Si, senor.*"

"That means mischief. Especially when we consider that he was with noted scouts in San Antonio. Those two could run in a crowd on us at any time if they knew where we camped. I'm inclined to think we shall be forced to return to the Frio. But here come our visitors."

Frank Ames and his friends now rode into the opening, their horses showing hard usage,

and their own faces being flushed with drink and excitement.

"Dudley, old boy, how are you?" said Frank, in a voice of extreme relief and pleasure. "We have had a long and rapid ride, and are not sorry we are at our journey's end. I have some of the old boys of the Brazos with me, you see. Don't you remember Burke Barnes, John Walker and John Stephens?"

As Frank spoke he walked his horse toward Capitan Caramba and extended his hand to the latter, whose manner, however, was far from being as cordial as the visitors had been led to expect.

The bandit chief somewhat reluctantly took the hand of Ames, who was not slow to notice the coldness of his reception.

"You are welcome to the scant accommodations of my camp, gentlemen," said the captain, rather haughtily.

"Did you receive the information in regard to the movements of the Bowen outfit, Capitan Caramba?" asked Frank, thinking that possibly he had offended the outlaw by addressing him in too familiar a manner.

The bandit chief, by way of reply, pointed to the Mestizo.

Frank recognized the half-breed, and asked quickly:

"Who wounded you in that manner, my friend?"

"Senor Adler. But I will have his heart's blood. Ignacio Valdez will not sleep until he is food for wolves."

The expression of pleased surprise on the face of Ames was noticed by the chief, who curled his lip in scorn, for he detected his cowardly thoughts instantly.

"Have you seen the wagons, Ignacio, since the Bowens left San Antonio?" asked Frank, with some impatience.

There was an angry glitter in the eye of Capitan Caramba at this. He did not permit the spy to answer, but raised his own hand and pointed.

Frank Ames gazed out across the plain, and saw a scattering line of desperate-looking men riding toward the bend, and about half a mile in their rear was a wagon. All this he and his comrades had before observed, but had not dreamed that the wagon could be one of the two owned by Colonel Bowen.

"Can it be possible?" he said, in surprise and joy; "that you have captured the Bowen outfit so soon is almost too good to be true. This will be a rich haul for you, Dud, for I'm a liberal paymaster."

"I generally pay myself, sir," returned the bandit chief, curtly. "I seldom trust to the promises of others."

Ames was greatly worried in mind by the words and manner of his old associate. The letters which had passed between them for some years were in the most friendly language, and he had placed the gold of the Bowens in the hands of the outlaw, so to speak; for the latter would have known nothing in regard to the movements of the old colonel had he not informed him. Frank was extremely puzzled, and those whom he had induced to accompany him were in a very embarrassing position, not having been even invited to dismount.

"Did you find the gold?" Frank next inquired.

"Yes," was the laconic reply of Capitan Caramba.

Slowly the bandit band now rode into the opening, and sat their horses near their leader, all looking with surprise and curiosity upon the new-comers, who could scarce keep from shuddering, as they found themselves in the midst of such a ruffianly horde.

"Did you secure the colonel and Belle?" asked Frank.

"I secured the colonel and Belle," answered the captain, with a peculiar emphasis on the name of the young lady which increased Frank's perplexity.

"What has come over you, Dudley? You do not seem to be as friendly to me, as I expected I would find you. Judging from your letters, I thought you would be pleased to meet me, and especially after I had placed information in your hands which enabled you to enrich yourself and band more than a dozen dangerous raids would have done. Fifty thousand in gold is not picked up every day, and besides there is more for you in prospect, when I get the Bowen estates into my hands."

"Fifty thousand dollars is a mere bagatelle with me, sir," said the bandit chief. "If you were so anxious to capture the outfit why did

you communicate with me at all? You have three men with you, and I would not give a picayune for you, if, with such help, you could not overpower an old man and a few niggers. However, I believe Belle Bowen would have shot all four of you, for she sent two of my men to grass."

As Capitan Caramba spoke, the assembled ruffians muttered oaths of rage, at recalling the death of their comrades, whom they had forgotten in their brutal lust and thirst for blood.

This caused Frank Ames to be still more anxious. He began to tremble for his personal safety. From the cold reception which he and his friends had received, together with the words of the bandit chief, and the vengeful mutterings of his men, he was forced to conclude that the outlaws were much exasperated by the death of two of their number, and that, as he had been the cause of their attacking the Bowen outfit, they might be prompted to murder him and his party. He attributed the cold words and manner of Capitan Caramba, to the disaster met with on the plain, and he now began to fear that bodily harm would come to the colonel and his daughter, which, in the event of escaping himself, would ruin all his plans, reducing him to poverty, and with no hope of gaining wealth in the future. He had staked his all on this issue. He had borrowed quite a sum from his sporting friends to purchase horses and equipments, and to defray the expenses of the trip; and, after having absented himself from his old resorts at the very time that the Bowens had left their home on the Trinity, should it become known that they had been foully dealt with, the crime would be laid at his door. And, besides, there were sufficient proofs along the trail to show plainly that he had been implicated in a plot to waylay them. He knew too, that those whom he had employed were liable at any moment, "in their cups," to betray him, and to concoct plans to shield themselves from any complicity with him in the capture of the Bowens.

Frank, therefore, began to be most fearfully concerned, and to think more of escape than of the accomplishment of his plan, which he now decided to be a very difficult programme to carry through as previously arranged; but, as the wagon came nearer, his whole attention was fastened upon it, and his perplexed mind ran riot with a thousand and one new plans and projects.

Suddenly Capitan Caramba sprung away from his horse, gazing with a strange look toward the point of entrance, as he exclaimed in a loud tone:

"What the deuce is the matter with that driver? The team is coming in wild, and with loose reins!"

At this moment the sentinel sprung from his post, and uttered an exclamation of horror. He then made a bound into the bushes, and at the same time, the animals, frightened by this movement of the Mexican, swerved to one side, and broke into a headlong gallop, speeding along the border of the timber toward the river, the wagon jolting this way and that, among the tall bunch grass.

Capitan Caramba vaulted into his saddle, spurred his horse in chase, and yelled furiously:

"Head them off, boys! Head them off, I say! There's something wrong there. Head them off!"

Every bandit had sat his steed, speechless with astonishment; for all of them had caught a glimpse of the pale face, and the fixed, glassy, glaring eyes of the driver, as well as the strange and unnatural posture in which he was seated.

However, when the order of their chief rung in their ears, all dashed deep their spurs, and flew to the right and left, surrounding the affrighted team, and bringing them to a halt.

No sooner had the bandit leader yelled his order, and asserted that something was wrong, than Frank Ames, with a quick gesture of warning to his three comrades, slowly guided his horse toward the narrow trail that led to the opening.

The three young men followed, until near the undergrowth; then, for an instant, they drew rein.

"We are in a tight fix, boys," said Frank; "and when I give the order, follow me, or we are lost. We must ford the river at once, and take chances."

As he said this, a loud yell of surprise and rage came from the outlaw chief, as he cried out, in a voice of fury:

"Boys, the driver has been murdered, and the captives have escaped!"

"Come, boys, quick! It's life or death now," exclaimed Frank Ames; and while the bandits were all, with bitter curses of furious rage, inspecting the wagon, the new-comers, unseen by the sentinel, spurred their horses in desperate haste through the timber, beyond the bend. Then, plunging into the river, they forded the same, and struck for the south plain, while their ears were tortured, and their blood chilled by the fiendish yells that were now turning the bandit camp into pandemonium.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WACOS ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN Capitan Caramba discovered that the driver of the wagon, although seated in his place, was dead, and that the colonel and Belle had made their escape, his rage was terrible. In his fury, he hurled the dead teamster to the earth, as if the man murdered in his service had been the cause of his loss.

This done, he began tossing over the goods in the wagon, throwing them out, until the supplies were all upon the ground. Then, springing from the wagon, his face contorted with baffled fury, he cried out:

"By all the fiends! Boys, the gold is gone! To horse! A score of you follow me. We'll have back that which blood has been spilled for. *Vamonos!*"

The next moment, with a score of brutes at his back, the bandit chief dashed from the opening, on the back trail, and ordering his men to be silent, as they had, since learning the loss of the gold, been yelling like demons who had been cheated of their victim.

Only a short time did it take for the outlaws to reach a point near to that where, across the river, the Comanches were concealed with the same captives who had so recently escaped from their own power; and so excited and enraged had the bandits been, that they never once thought of the four visitors who had been so coolly treated by their chief. Capitan Caramba himself had also forgotten them, in his new trouble and excitement.

Still galloping at headlong speed, sweeping the plain with quick but keen glances, to detect those who, he had no doubt, were crouching in the grass, they were soon brought to a halt by the yells and shrieks from beyond the river. Then, at a gesture from their chief, they walked their animals slowly and cautiously toward the bottom timber, and entered the dark shades, their weapons grasped tightly, ready, if need be, for a desperate conflict.

As has been mentioned, the river at this point was very difficult to ford, although the Indians had not been delayed in crossing by this fact, as they were well acquainted with every turn, and break, and shallow, in the San Miguel. But, as it was quite dark beneath the thick foliage, and it was impossible to discover the one place where the Comanches had forded, the bandits were compelled to halt within a pistol-shot of a party of men of whose character they were in total ignorance.

Capitan Caramba was not only greatly puzzled, but he was most extremely dumfounded; and the desperate fury which had ruled him since discovering the loss of the gold, cooled down under the mystery now in front of him, which he strove in vain to account for, although he recalled the fact that Frank Ames and his comrades had left his camp in the excitement attendant upon the arrival of the wagon.

It did not seem possible that Frank and his party had reached this distance from the bend; and, supposing this to be the case, what occasion could they have for such a hubbub? Such sounds could not have been given except by mortals in the extremity of fear or agony, and that the shrieks had proceeded from strong men, was beyond a doubt.

No sounds of a conflict, other than these, had met his ear. No fire-arms had been used, to indicate that the men who had visited his camp had quarreled among themselves, and fought. No signs of any other party being on the river had been reported by his guards and spies. Capitan Caramba began to feel cold chills run through his blood, as he gazed over the black rolling waters into the dark shades beyond, through which had come so recently, such cries of agony, but which now were silent as the grave.

The outlaw chief and his men sat their horses as if dazed, peering over the stream, and all

hearing the rustle of leaves and twigs, although no breeze fanned their livid cheeks. Suddenly the spell was broken. The bandit leader scented danger in his front and threw off the depressing influence which ruled him for the moment only. He caught up his bridle-rein, intending to whirl about and return to the plain, but at the same instant that he was forming the word of command, the twang of a score of bow-strings sounded from the shadows beyond the river, followed by the whirr of deadly arrows, and then mingled with the screams of agony from the wounded bandits, and the human-like shrieks of mustangs, as the Comanche war-whoop rung out with blood-curdling power.

Capitan Caramba is himself again. Untouched by the volley of the Indians, he yelled to his followers, as he fired a fusilade from his revolvers into the darkness.

"Give them hot lead, boys! Then spur for the plains!"

But a few of his men remained to heed the order, for the Mexicans who had escaped being seriously wounded, had fled in terror, none but the white desperadoes standing their ground long enough to discharge their revolvers. However, the death-yells that sounded from over the San Miguel proved that, although the enemy were protected by the darkness and the thick bushes, the lead had not all been wasted.

Leaving their wounded and dead on the bank of the stream where they fell, the outlaws made good time to the moonlit plain, where Capitan Caramba, insane with rage, ordered his band to reload and follow him, for he now felt sure that it was the Indians who had killed his teamster, and taken his gold and captives.

He resolved to recover his losses and avenge the slain; and although his men were demoralized by the unexpected disasters, and were averse to engaging in any fight which promised no return, they dared not falter, but spurred after their leader down-stream to a fordable spot in the river, which was well known to all of them.

Soon again their ears were filled with the most horrible screams of deathly agony, cutting the night air and chilling the very marrow in their bones. Thinking that the Comanches were now torturing his wounded men, the bandit leader urged his horse and men to greater speed. After fording the river, they cautiously made their way to the undergrowth near which the Indians had been posted, sending on in advance a spy to reconnoiter, who shortly gave a signal to approach—that all was well.

The outlaws now dashed into the clear space that had been the halting-place of the Indians, but no paint-daubed face or form met their view.

A faint moan, however, sounded from the direction of the south plain, and the bandits, confident that the Comanches had gone, urged their steeds toward the spot whence the sound proceeded, but could discover nothing until they rode into the edge of the moonlit prairie, when, upon turning their horses toward the timber, a terrible sight met their view, causing even the Mexican murderers and Mestizo butchers to quake in their boots.

Four small trees had been trimmed of their branches for ten feet, and all underbrush cut away, and between these trees was a sight that would have caused a peace commissioner to turn scalp-taker.

Barnes, Stephens and Walker all were here; but all three—thank God!—were dead. All were beyond the pale of the fearful suffering that had racked their frames more than if they had been burned at the stake. As seen by the outlaws, they bore no semblance to humanity, except in form, for all were one mass of gore.

To the base of the trees, next the earth, the feet of all had been secured, and their hands had been outstretched and elevated above their heads, and also bound fast. Their toe and finger-nails had been pulled out, and their scalps had been taken. Their eyelids had been cut away. Their tongues had been half-severed, and their ears had been hacked from their heads. Next, the red fiends had cut gashes with their knives and arrow points upon all parts of their bodies and limbs, causing a slow and horrible death to the three young men who had been lured from civilization by a thirst for gold, offered by one who had seduced them from the paths of virtue and honesty, and by keeping them in a semi-intoxicated condition, induced them to stoop to crime for

the furtherance of his own dishonorable and dastardly aims.

Even the cowardly bandits, who had themselves, many of them, but recently perpetrated a most horrible crime upon the defenseless quadroon, and then murdered her, with the others on the prairie—even they grew sick and faint and turned away in horror, while Capitan Caramba, who had known these ill-fated men in their innocent boyhood, as he rode off in haste, bowed his head to conceal the tortured expression of his features, at the same time yelling:

"Come on! The hell-hounds will attack our camp!"

Not fifty yards had the bandit chief galloped, however, when he jerked his horse to a halt, as did his followers, for half a mile ahead on the plain were a score of Comanches, and in their midst were a gray-haired man and a beautiful girl.

Desperate and daring as he usually was, Capitan Caramba, although he saw his captives in the hands of a force but a little stronger than his own, his men being also much better armed, he turned his steed, and dashed, shuddering, into the timber, completely unnerved by the sight, and determined to be at the head of his whole command before attacking such inhuman monsters—forgetting that, taking his own advantages of education and civilization into consideration, he was a thousand times worse than they.

In half an hour more he was again in the bend, with near a score of Rio Grande devils around him and a dozen as desperate and merciless whites as ever cut the throat of a sleeping man; but he little thought that more than half a hundred Comanches were within half a mile of his retreat, drawn thither by the report of their spies. Not only this, but other dangers, quite as unexpected, were threatening him; all brought on him by his compact with one whom he had already insulted and scorned—in fact, driven into the very clutches of the Comanches.

The fact that Frank Ames was not with his tortured comrades was no proof, however, that he still lived, and the bandit chief reasoned that Frank had been killed while defending himself against capture.

But Captain Caramba was not the man to quail, or avoid a fight, when he saw any chance of defeating those who opposed him; and as he gathered his desperadoes about him, he became more like his former self. The fact that Belle Bowen was the only woman he had ever met, who had created such a passion in his breast that he now felt, since he had seen her in the power of the Comanches, most keenly tearing at a part of his anatomy which he never before believed that he possessed, determined him to save her, even at the risk of his life; although he knew, that in so doing, he was running great danger of losing his authority over the cowardly Greasers who had more fear of an Indian, than all else on earth.

He now informed his men that he had no doubt the Comanches had secured the box of gold; and not only this, but if they could clean out the war-party, they would get their captives back, from whom a large sum could be secured as ransom, besides the horses of the Indians could be sold over the Bravo (Rio Grande) for a large amount.

Ignorant of the fact that more than twice the number of Indians they had seen, were lurking within a few rifle-shots of their camp, it needed no lengthy argument to induce the outlaws to make the attack.

The moon, although still shining brightly, was now low in the western sky, casting its brilliant rays aslant, its arrows kissing alike the paint-daubed cheek of the Comanche, the yellow face of the Mexican, the bronzed features of the Texan outlaw, and the pallid lily skin of the trembling captive in the Comanche camp.

Out upon the northwest plain, hidden by a bend of the San Miguel, the orb of night shone down upon a galloping mass of Waco warriors.

On, like a mass of dry leaves before the north wind, with Wild Wolf at their head, flew the Wacos; their fierce black eyes darting glances ahead, their quirks hissing through the air, their mustangs snorting and panting—all bent forward, with rifles grasped tightly, as the hoofs of their steeds cut the flowers and the dew-flecked grass from the parent stems, sending showers of pearly drops upon every side.

On the south bank of the San Miguel, the

moon smiled placidly also upon three men, who were driving the cruel spur at every bound of their steeds, as their eyes stare fixedly and painfully ahead, their sense of hearing strained to the utmost, their faces bearing the impress of agonizing concern and deadly resolution, while tight compressed lips and grating teeth promise no mercy to those who have stolen their jewel.

On, thus, ride Big Foot Wallace, Sharp Eye, and Post Oak Bill; with every muscle, nerve and sense, strained to the utmost, ready at any moment for deadly battle, insanely eager to hurl themselves among the Comanches.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN HIS POWER.

WHEN Maggie Moore recovered her senses, she found herself securely fastened to a tree opposite her home. She was at first unable to collect her ideas, but the sight of the red braves who, to her horror, were mutilating the bodies of Juan and Antonio, brought to her mind, only too vividly, the dread occurrences of the night.

She shivered from head to foot, as she saw the Indians tear the scalps from the dead, and held her head between her hands to shut out the dread view.

A hideous, repulsive-looking fiend, who stood near, would at times thrust his paint-daubed face closely to hers, causing the poor girl to grow faint with loathing; and it was relief indeed to her, when the horrible orgies were over, and she was bound fast upon one of her own horses.

The fire from the *raquero*'s hut was now but faint and flickering, casting out at times a weird light, amid which here and there, in confused preparation, rushed the painted demons, presenting a scene most appalling. This however, lasted but a short time, for ten braves were ordered by the chief, Rolling Thunder, to hasten west with all the stolen stock; and the main party, with poor hopeless Maggies in their midst, forded the San Miguel, and galloped at headlong speed down the river. Maggie felt sure that her lover would soon reach the ranch with help, and that they would follow the trail; but she feared he would not be able to collect a force sufficient to rescue her from such a strong war-party.

She knew that the Comanches would not dare travel very far east, lest the whites might collect a party of scouts and rangers, of sufficient strength to annihilate them. This worried her greatly, for the Indians might at any moment, especially if they saw signs of enemies in their front, or of pursuit, turn south over the plain to the Rio Frio; and then, under cover of the timber, hasten northwest toward their distant villages, from which, if she was so unfortunate as to be taken there, she could not hope for rescue or escape from a fate too terrible to think of.

On swept the fast galloping horde like a tornado, the hundreds of hoofs whisking through the grass, causing a sound like the rush of a fierce norther, the quick, sharp snorts of the half-wild steeds being the only sounds that broke the stillness of the night, except the rattle and clatter of arrows in their quivers; for no words came from the savage lips of those who surrounded her, causing the painted horde, who kept gazing ahead and from right to left, to look doubly diabolical and frightful from this very silence.

Poor Maggie glanced over the savage band, and in her half-crazed mind decided that she was lost; that it would only result in disaster and death to the scouts if they made an attempt to save her from the clutches of such a numerous war party.

On they sped for at least an hour and a half, then suddenly they turned their horses into the timber and forded the San Miguel, encamping upon the north side of the stream, at a point where their animals and themselves were securely hidden by the bottom timber and dense thorny undergrowth which grew along the edge of the same, near the plain.

Desperately and dangerously situated as the young girl was, she retained throughout a calm and firm exterior, which, from the fact that she was alone, the only captive, caused the red braves to look upon her with admiration and something of respect, aside from the feelings of the same character, occasioned by her great beauty, which to them seemed unnatural, and belonging to another world.

She was conscious that the Indians had been

impressed by this, for they were less rough when they removed her from her horse, and secured her with more consideration for her comfort than they had before shown. Still, she was tied in such a way that it was impossible to escape.

A gourd of water was held to her lips by a young brave, and she drank a long draught, as she was very thirsty and feverish from excitement and horror; but she controlled herself by a great effort, and her eyes took note of each movement of her savage captors, her mind being filled with a whirlwind of thoughts in regard to her dreadful position, and speculations in relation to the possibility of her friends effecting her rescue.

She had noticed that an Indian had galloped from down the river, and met the party who held her captive, and that a short halt and consultation followed. Shortly after this they had crossed the stream and encamped, and Maggie judged that some important news had been received from this lone brave, who was doubtless an advance spy. She hoped that this news was of the presence of whites, who would bar further progress, or who were informed as to the raid, and would attack the Indians. But, of all the thoughts that rushed through her brain, none gave her more concern than the probability that her lover, Sharp Eyes, would become so anxious in regard to her safety, that, upon reaching the Medina river, he would send some one of the rancheros at the Pleasanton ford to San Antonio after Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill, and then return to the ranch; when, upon finding the *raqueros* murdered and herself gone, he might follow on the trail alone, and thus endeavoring to rescue her, lose his own life. Then, again, should he succeed in getting help, the whites would not be of sufficient numerical strength to combat with the Indians. Even such invincibles as the two noted scouts could not, except by strategy, be of any assistance to her.

Maggie observed that the Indians built no fires, and not only this, but that they retained their war equipments, their mustangs being secured, here and there, without their jaw straps or saddles being removed, and from this she concluded that there must be enemies to them and friends to her near at hand, or these precautions against sudden attack, or preparations for speedy flight would not have been taken.

It was some time after reaching the dark shades of the timber before her eyes became so accustomed to the situation that she could make these discoveries, there being but here and there a ray of moonlight, which, darting through the thick foliage, caused the scene to appear more wild and unnatural, especially when the plumed and painted savages stalked between the gigantic trees with their festoons of Spanish moss and conversed together in low and ominous guttural tones.

Warnona had proceeded but a short distance after leaving George Adler bathing his head in the stream, before she halted, and removing her beaded costume, turned the same inside out, it being lined with dark green cloth. She then bound several large leaves about her lower limbs and head, thus rendering herself almost invisible against the background of verdure, even in the moonlight.

This done, she glided, graceful as a panther, through the timber, and crossed the river amid the interlaced limbs and vines which over arched the inky waters.

As she approached the southern margin of the belt of trees, she moved more slowly and cautiously; at times stopping to listen; and she soon discovered that she was within a short distance of the Comanches who had captured the friends of Water Warrior. The war-party were secreted amid the undergrowth at the very edge of the bottom, apparently watching the plain to the west, the river here making a gradual bend which gave a clear view of the approaches up the stream.

Well aware that such a small number of hostile braves would not be far from a larger force, Warnona resolved to return to Water Warrior, and with him, make their way to ascertain the strength and position of all foes, thereby securing knowledge that would greatly benefit her chief and the scouts, should they return to the rescue of the Bowens.

She reasoned that the braves before her were waiting for the main war-party from Post Oak Bill's ranch; and this fact almost proved conclusively that Wild Wolf and the

scouts would arrive too late to save the young squaw on the San Miguel.

With this conviction came the thought that she might be the means of saving Maggie Moore from the merciless Comanches; and as Maggie had, on more than one occasion befriended her, Warnona was eager to do all in her power, even at the risk of her life to rescue the Rose of the San Miguel.

Warnona stole back to the spot where she had left George Adler, but to her great concern he was not to be found. His sombrero lay on the river bank, and the fair squaw at first thought he had fallen into the stream, but she soon found that this was not the case, upon discovering that his horse was gone also. She had secured the mustang herself, and knew that it was impossible for the animal to have gotten loose. Water Warrior had vanished, and it was impossible to follow his trail until daylight; when it would probably be useless to do so, as she had no doubt he would be killed or captured before sunrise, as his reckless manner proved that, upon seeing his friends captives to the Comanches, he would again expose himself in the same way that he did when he first came within sight of them. However, she had but little idea that he would be able to discover them, as it was a very difficultfeat to ford the river at this point.

Mounting her mustang, Warnona urged the animal up the stream some distance, then forded it at a point half-way between the Comanche war-party and the bandit camp, and where she could observe the screen of bushes in which the Indians were concealed. As she came up, she was startled by a series of wild yells of rage, from up the stream, and she gazed out toward the west, and over the plain, along the border of the timber. But a moment did she look, when she was again surprised by seeing four white men gallop their steeds frantically from the bottom, and then urge them in her direction, keeping near the cover of the trees.

Warnona now remembered having seen four horsemen speeding over the plain toward the point where she felt sure the bad white men and Mexicans under Capitan Caramba were encamped.

That these men were in league with the bandits she felt sure; therefore when she realized that they were about to ride into the very camp of the Comanches, she felt no desire to warn them. On the contrary, she was rejoiced that some of the enemies of Water Warrior and her other white friends would be put out of the way from further troubling them.

As the four men came opposite her covert, the young squaw saw that they were pale as death, having been apparently greatly frightened by the yells in the camp from which they had just come, and which now sounded from the north plain, proving that the bandits were going east, either in search of the men before her or the captives she had seen in the power of the Comanches. The yells, however, soon ceased, and all became still again.

As the quartette came toward Warnona, all at times glancing over their shoulders in terror, she saw Water Warrior spur his horse in terrific bounds from the bushes to the west of her, directly in their path.

That George Adler was now insane from the blow his head had received on the Medina, the loss of blood, and his terrible anxiety of mind, Warnona had no longer a doubt; indeed she had feared it, when she struggled to prevent him from rushing among the Comanches, and now surely no sane man would have attacked a party of four armed horsemen, unless he courted death.

But Warnona had no desire to expose herself to the view of the Indians down the stream; so she was forced to witness the encounter, without giving aid to her white brother, who, she felt, would be killed.

It required all her strong will power to control herself; but surprises were not at an end, for as George Adler dashed toward the four men he drew his knife, and singling out one of the number, spurred his horse directly against the animal, nearly hurling both to the earth by the shock.

Grasping the man by the throat, George, with a look of insane desperation that was terrible to witness, pointed his knife down the river, as his glassy eyes became fixed upon the companions of his captive.

Filled with horror, but none of them daring to draw weapon, for they saw the butt of two revolvers projecting from the holsters at the saddle-horn of the maniac, the trio dashed

madly down the stream, leaving their comrade to his death.

A loud peal of laughter sounded from the throat of George Adler, as his grip tightened; and as his horse bounded forward, Ames was forced backward upon his animal, his eyes protruding and his upturned face filled with horror and dread.

George Adler, with insane cunning, slipped one arm through his bridle rein, and at the same instant his captive slid over the tail of his beast; the crazed avenger flung himself from his saddle directly upon the half-strangled plotter, without relinquishing his torturing grip at his throat.

Quickly clutching the revolvers and knife of Frank Ames, George threw them out of reach in the long grass, and then, with a peal of exultant laughter, he jerked his captive to his feet with a strength that was born of madness, and forced him toward and into the cover of the underbrush.

Warnona was so amazed at all this, that she sat still in utter bewilderment, much relieved, however, when she saw that Water Warrior had succeeded in securing his enemy, without harm to himself.

This was a new kind of warfare to the squaw, and she was puzzled to know why her white friend had not, having the advantage of a surprise, shot more of his enemies; for she supposed that if one of the party was his foe, they all must be so.

Like all of her race, she was not willing to interfere with, or even approach her friend, now that he was undoubtedly insane. The Great Spirit had laid His hand upon the head of Water Warrior, and this being so, she must avoid him.

However, Warnona was not left long to meditate upon the mental condition of her white brother, for a thought of the other three men suddenly flashed upon her mind, connecting them with the deadly danger they were unconsciously galloping to meet down the river, and she glanced quickly in that direction, just in time to see a line of painted Comanches dash headlong from the dark shades of the bottom timber, directly into the path of the three fugitives.

She saw the glint of arrows in the moonlight. She heard a series of agonizing shrieks and cries. Then, white and red vanished in the dark timber of the San Miguel.

CHAPTER XXII. BROTHER AND SISTER.

WHEN Warnona saw that the companions of the man who had been captured by Water Warrior had been dragged by the Comanches into the timber, she knew that they were doomed, and she then turned her attention to the little thicket to the north of her, into which her unfortunate white friend had jerked his quaking, terrified captive.

Making her way stealthily through the bushes, the young squaw soon reached a point where, unobserved, she could witness the proceedings of George Adler, but with which she had no intention of interfering; for she felt assured that the stranger had, at some time, greatly wronged Water Warrior, or the latter would not have shown such intense hatred and desire for revenge, at a time, too, when he was driven to desperate madness, principally by the knowledge that his friends and his promised wife were in the power of the Comanches.

As Warnona peered through the branches, she saw that her white brother had bound his captive fast to a tree, and that the face of the latter was stamped with the most abject terror and dread, for there was no mercy in the glassy orbs that now gazed vengefully into his.

With one quick wrench, George Adler tore the clothing from the neck to the waist of Frank Ames, baring the white breast of the latter, who was speechless and hopeless, as the bright steel flashed in the moonlight before his eyes, and held in the vise-like grip of his maniac captor.

Thus they stood in the silent forest; one, dumb through deathly fear, the other, from wounds and a tortured heart and brain. One, bent on murder, the other, paralyzed, with a prayer for mercy trembling on his pallid lips—a prayer that he sought to call up from memory's chamber, unspoken since his childhood.

Piercing and vengeful was the glance of the eye that met his, showing no more mercy than

glittered in the deadly uplifted steel, which seemed to be delayed in air only to torture the breast into which it was to be buried; but, as the firm hand that held the blade was drawn back to give more force to the blow, there sounded from down the river, a chorus of heart-rending shrieks of agony and horror, ending in unearthly sounds that seemed impossible to have proceeded from either man, beast, or bird.

George Adler whirled in his tracks, his hands were pressed hard upon his forehead, and his eyes protruded from their sockets, as he stared into the deep gloom surrounding him, and listened to the dread sounds from down the river.

It appeared to Warnona that there was a faint impression in the brain of Water Warrior that pointed toward his captured friends, connecting the latter with the fearful cries which had just reached him; but that he could not collect his wandering thoughts from labyrinthian trails, and arrive at a conclusion sufficiently clear to guide him to action. She was the more positive that this was the case, when she saw him sink listlessly to the earth, where he sat still silent, his forehead clasped tightly by both hands, his eyes closed, and apparently endeavoring to solve the mystery of his condition, seemingly forgetful of his captive, who with a deep-drawn sigh of relief, wrenched at his bonds, in a vain attempt to free himself from them.

Warnona's great wish was that her white friend would not at present recover his normal senses, as she felt sure he would immediately sacrifice his life in an attempt to rescue that old man and the beautiful maiden from the Comanches.

The wild war-whoops and rattle of fire-arms which soon followed the dread cries, which Warnona knew proceeded from tortured whites, simply caused her white brother to lift his head for a moment, his hands being pressed tightly over his temples; but, soon after, when the dull tramp of many horses came to her from the plain, she noticed that Water Warrior braced himself, and crawled upon hands and knees through the bushes toward the edge of the timber, whence he could gaze out over the plain. The squaw followed, taking a parallel course, and also looked out at the same time, casting a glance now and then toward George Adler, who seemed incapable of motion from the time he first caught a glimpse of the moonlit plain, or rather, of the parties who were now passing over the same toward the north.

Much to the relief of Warnona, she saw that the gray-haired man and the two maidens, who had been in the wagon, and were the friends of Water Warrior, were still alive, they having been bound to horses, amid a horde of Comanches, who were fresh from torturing the three men, and from battling with foes whom she supposed to be the bandits, and now passed up the river, stopping just opposite her covert to wave their lances in exultation to a party of horsemen down the stream.

The squaw was now certain that the fight, the sounds of which she had heard, had occurred between the bad white men and Comanches, and she also knew that the latter had been the victors. But Warnona was now most concerned in regard to Water Warrior who, she feared, would dash out from the bushes, on seeing his friends among the hostiles; but she was most agreeably disappointed, for George Adler seemed to be unable to separate the real scene before him from the many like scenes, which were flitting through his now fever disordered brain.

The defiant manner of the small war-party, who seemed to be not at all afraid of an equal number, proved conclusively to the squaw that there must be a larger force near at hand; and she decided that the Comanches, who had raided the ranch of Post Oak Bill, were now secreted in the timber, not far from the spot where George Adler was crouched.

These thoughts led Warnona to think of Wild Wolf and the scouts; and, if her previous reasonings were correct, she felt sure that they were now galloping to the rescue of Maggie Moore, if the latter had not been killed by the savages at the ranch.

Paying no more attention to George Adler, she glided swiftly up the river, passed the outlaw camp, which was in great confusion, and then proceeding in a more stealthy manner, soon found herself in the vicinity of the main war-party of Comanches. The Waco squaw

soon saw Maggie, and then greatly relieved, but seeing it was impossible to aid her, stole on up the San Miguel to try and intercept the scouts, and give them the valuable information she had gained.

Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill had been so deeply concerned in regard to the danger of Maggie Moore and the ranch, that they, galloping as they did, from the Medina, found no time to explain to Sharp Eye who the young man was whom he had found with them at the ford; consequently Sharp Eye knew nothing of the Bowen outfit, and it was well he did not, for he had enough to weigh him down as it was, and especially after he found that his promised wife had been taken captive by the Comanches.

The three scouts were dashing, as we have previously described, down along the edge of the timber on the south side of the San Miguel, and had reached a point not more than a mile above the Comanche war-party, when they were brought to a sudden halt, by observing an Indian, standing boldly in the moonlight, with both hands uplifted, and the palms extended toward them, thus proving that he was a friend.

However, they slackened the pace of their steeds, but upon coming nearer, recognized Warnona.

"Wa-al, dod-gast my puserlanious panther-cat!" exclaimed Big Foot; "ef thar ain't Wild Wolf's squaw what we-uns left et ther Medina. I never know'd ther Waco ter spit out a squar' lie, but I'll sw'ar his tongua must 'a' bin kinder crooked when he said thet Warnona war et ther lodge down crick."

The hearts of the scouts were filled with joy, as they discovered the young squaw, and heard the words of Wallace, who was confident that no foes were lurking within hearing of his voice.

The two first-mentioned scouts knew that Warnona must have some important intelligence, and even Big Foot, although he spoke as he did, well knew that Wild Wolf had not lied.

"For God's sake, Warnona," cried Sharp Eye, "tell us if you have seen Maggie."

"Jerk hit out quick!" exclaimed Post Oak Bill.

"My white sister has not sung her death-song," said the squaw. "She is in Comanche camp, but the braves of the llanos build no fires."

Post Oak Bill dashed the tears of gratitude from his eyes, and gripped his rifle with a firmer hold, while Sharp Eye removed his sombrero, and looked upward.

"How many o' ther cusses air thar on the San Miguel?" asked Big Foot Wallace.

"Mebbe so you know how many warriors at ranch? My white brothers have seen trail."

"Thar war 'bout sixty lit in on Antone an' Juan, but ther boys wiped out eight or ten, afore they lost thar ha'r. 'Bout fifty, I reckon, skuted down this-a-ways," said the Giant Scout.

"More down river before they come," said Warnona. "So many;" and she opened and closed her hands, with fingers extended, designating twenty, then raising one hand to indicate five, she added: "So many git shot."

"Who in ther name o' Crockett shot 'em?"

"Bad white men," answered the Waco squaw.

"Capitan Caramba and his gang?"

"Yes."

"Wa-al," exclaimed Big Foot, "ef we-uns c'u'd git up a fandang' 'tween ther fellers an' reds, an' then skip in arter Maggie, bit would be a scrumptious game ter play. Anyways I'm dang glad Capitan Caramba hev gut biz on his han's."

"Bad whites took wagons before Comanches come," continued Warnona. "Burn one wagon. Kill black people on prairie. Tie gray hair man. Tie white squaw. Put in wagon. Comanches take white captives from bad Mexicans and bad white men."

"Great Je-hoss-i-fat!" burst out Big Foot, in deep concern as well as fury; "whar's Adler?"

"He heap bad in head. So many white men ride fast to camp of Capitan Caramba—" Warnona held up four fingers—"then ride on plain. Water Warrior catch one. Comanches all rest. All kill. Hear yell much heap at torture."

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" yelled Wallace, "hold me, somebody! Both ther leetle gals tuck by ther cussed reds. Ef I doesn't wade over

my butes in Curmarch bleed I'm a dodgasted pervaricator. But we-uns hes gut ter play shy, an' keep our peepers peeled. If leetle Maggie, er leetle Belle gits a scratch, or loses a ba'r, I'll skin every cussel Curmarch in ther hull dod-blasted country!"

Post Oak and Sharp Eye, although almost insane with impatience, knew that careful planning and a thorough knowledge of the situation ahead, was necessary for the success of their attempt at rescue, and both were greatly amazed at the information brought them by Warnona.

Sharp Eye had started at the mention of Adler, but when Wallace spoke the name of Belle, he spurred quickly to his side, and asked with much anxiety and excitement of manner:

"Who are this Adler and Belle, that you speak of?"

"Adler air the man what war with me an' Bill at ther ford, when yer rid up on t'other side. He was wantin' us ter go an' perfect a outfit o' two wagons, same as Warnona says was tuck by Capitan Caramba. Adler hed followed 'em from Brazos-ways, an' I reckon he war soft on ther girl, leetle Belle, es purty a lady as I ever see'd. Thar war four cusses from down country arter ther outfit. One on 'em—Frank Ames he said his handle war, bein' on a crooked game ter git Miss Belle, hes gut balked, bit 'pears. What's ther matter, Sharp Eye?"

The young scout was reeling in his saddle, his face ghastly, but he braced up, and demanded:

"Who is this Belle? What is her other name?"

"Her dad's name an' hern, that is, the last handle, air Bowen. He air curnil, an' she air Belle."

"Great Go!! This is more than I can bear. Friends, pards, Belle Bowen is my sister—my only blood relation on earth! Think of it! She too I love more than all the world—both in the power of those fiendish savages. Come, Bill! Come, Wallace! We must save them, even without the aid of Wild Wolf. I must go at once. I cannot control myself, with this new anguish added."

Never were two men more surprised than were Post Oak Bill and Big Foot Wallace. They both stared at Sharp Eye, thinking that he had gone mad. They had never heard him speak the name of Bowen, and supposed his name to be—as it was—Edward Duval.

But there was no time for explanations now. All gathered their reins to dash ahead, but Warnona held up her hand in a gesture that commanded attention, saying:

"My white brothers must go into the woods. Comanches watch plains. See scouts there. Kill white squaws. War-party only few shoots down the river. Leave Mustangs in bush. Try save captives. Warnona ride fast for Wacos. Where Wild Wolf go?"

"He rid off et stompede speed arter his fighters," answered Big Foot, "an' ther ain't no need o' your levantin' 'thout hit air ter guide him plum inter ther bestest p'int fer a squar' lunge et ther cusses. Skip, an' run in Wild Wolf on ther sly ef yer feels like hit, Warnona, fer we-uns is boun' ter hev ther seven year itch, er somethin' wusser, ef we doesn't git up an' dust mighty lively outen hyer on ther trail o' ther dod-gasted scariifers. Come, boyees, all this gab hed ter be slung, ter git a cl'ar trail toward reg'lar biz, 'thout takin' chances fer a bad break."

All dashed into the timber eastward, except the Waco squaw, who ran directly north, to cross the river, and gaze over the plain toward the Bandero Hills, from which point she looked for her warlike lord at the head of his braves.

The scouts proceeded some three-fourths of a mile down-stream, riding rapidly, but using great judgment and careful not to make the slightest noise. They then secreted their horses, as Warnona had counseled them, in a dense thicket, from which they stole, keeping in coves along the river-bank, toward the halting place of the red fiends, who held their loved captive, and who were liable, at any moment, to torture, death, or a fate infinitely worse.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE COMANCHE CAMP.

For some time after Warnona's departure, George Adler sat as she had left him, with his hands clasped about his fevered brow, and striving to grope through the distorted visions that swarmed in his brain, and to divide the

real from the unreal. There were instants when the dread facts were before his mind's eye in all the horrible vividness of reality; but no sooner did these facts flash upon, causing him to form plans instantaneously toward the assistance of the poor captives, than the thought of Belle's terrible position plunged his weakened brain once more into a sea of madness.

His struggle with Frank Ames—he having in a lucid moment recognized his rival, who he knew was the cause of all the disaster brought upon the Bowens—had caused the wound upon his head to break out afresh, and the blood now flowing down over his face, added to his inflamed eyes and wild look, gave him a truly horrid appearance.

It was while thus seated in the thicket, in the perplexing state of mind just mentioned, being totally unconscious of the existence of Frank Ames, his recent struggle being forgotten, that Adler was startled by a cry of surprise and relief, that sounded from behind him. Springing half upright, he peered through the bushes, and discovered the form of Ames, still bound to the tree, as he had himself secured him, although he did not at first recall what had passed. The face of Frank, being within a patch of moonlight, was fully and plainly revealed, and was filled, as his outcry had intimated, with extreme joy and relief, his eyes being fixed upon a cow path which wound through the bottom toward the bandit camp.

Frank Ames supposed that his enemy had gone, and although he had been expecting death at the hands of the maddened man, he now felt a still more terrible dread of the Indians, who, he was confident, had butchered his friends, and who had been seen by him, as they rode up the river, with the colonel, Belle and the quadroon girl in their midst. The firing down-stream he supposed to have been between the Comanches and the bandits, and he hoped that Capitan Caramba had met death in payment for his treachery to him in connection with the Bowens.

He now saw how foolish he had been to suppose that the outlaw chief would allow such a prize as Belle to slip through his hands, for such a paltry sum as he had paid for their capture. Had he and his friends secured the gold of Colonel Bowen, then he could have hired the very men who owed allegiance to the bandit chief to forward his schemes. Now, however, all was lost, and the Bowens were condemned to death, without doubt. He, too, was in danger of discovery at any moment; when the Comanches would torture him, as they had his unfortunate companions. It was while these depressing thoughts ruled the mind of Ames that he discovered a flitting human form approaching up the cow-path; and as the moon's rays for an instant lit up the face of the man, Ames was in a transport of joy, for the swollen, contorted visage of the Mestizo which he recognized seemed angelic to him, forgetting that his friendship and claims had been repudiated by the chief to whom this half-breed was no more than a slave.

The same light revealed the face of the Mestizo to George Adler, who, himself unseen, braced at once for conflict, his eyes glaring with insane joy at again meeting the ruffian who had escaped him both in San Antonio and on the Medina.

Notwithstanding that the half-breed knew his chief had suddenly changed from a friend of Ames to an enemy, he advanced with as cordial an air as it was possible for him to assume, holding up his bandaged hand in caution, he having evidently been sent by Capitan Caramba to spy out the position and strength of the Indians. Advancing, as if he feared danger on every side, the half-breed drew his knife with his left hand, and it was not until this moment that Frank Ames recalled the fact that the bandits could not, under the pressure of their leader, be friends of his, especially after having lost their captives and gold. As these thoughts flashed through his mind, the expression upon his face changed to one of abject terror; the Mestizo no longer having an angelic appearance, by being the harbinger of freedom from torture and death. It was possible that the half-breed had intended to liberate Ames, but as he saw the sudden change in the face of the latter, he became excited to frenzy, knowing that it implied a distrust and fear of him. Be it as it might, the Mestizo suddenly paused within five feet of the terrified captive, with knife tight gripped, his lips curling, his teeth grating and his black, treach-

erous eyes darting hate—most murderous hate—the expression of it being unmistakable. Ames strove to speak, but his tongue seemed paralyzed, and his breath came in dry gasps, as the horrible eyes of the half-breed glared fiercely into his.

George Adler watched the scene in amazement, for the face of the Mestizo was no longer within his view, and the expression on that of Ames was perplexing to him. Neither of them were, however, left long in suspense, for the half-breed, his teeth grating like a maniac, sprung with his glittering knife uplifted into the patch of moonlight, his hideous face being thrust close into that of his helpless victim, his snake-like eyes gazing gloatingly into his.

A blood-chilling hiss shot from the lips of the Mestizo, then he spat in the face of the wretched Ames, his knife still uplifted, as if he enjoyed the terrible torture he was inflicting. At this moment the flapping of wings, followed by the hoot of an owl afar overhead, caused the cowardly assassin to start with apprehension, and he drew his knife back, then, throwing his whole strength and weight into the blow, he plunged the deadly blade forward, missing, in his left-handed awkwardness and sudden alarm, a vital part, but burying the cuchillo in the shoulder of the young man, who, with a cry of horror and despair, now fainted away.

At this instant, with a bound like that of a panther, George Adler, his heart filled with hate, his form filled with the strength of a madman, sprung upon the assassin and buried his knife in the Mestizo's back, the steel crushing through the shoulder-blade. Leaving his knife in the wound, he jerked the cuchillo from the body of Frank Ames, and quickly cut loose a part of the lariat not in use, with which the latter was bound to the tree.

When the Mestizo felt the steel crash through his frame, filling him with an agony most excruciating, and deathlike faintness, which increased as the blood flowed profusely, he began beating the air with his hands; then, as George Adler sprung past him for the lariat, and he recognized the man who had on three occasions escaped him, now to turn up, when and where least expected, to be his slayer—when this knowledge flashed upon him, he was like all of his kind, filled with a superstitious dread that left no hope of life, and no intention to struggle against fate; and with prayers mumbling from his repulsive lips, and the blood welling from his wound and patterning upon the dead leaves, his hideous face filled with a horror of death, his palsied tongue refusing to utter the screams of agony and hopeless despair that gurgled in his throat, he fell forward to the earth.

Quickly did George Adler attach a rope's end to each of the wrists of the Mestizo; then, before the latter had fallen to the ground, he secured the other ends of the rope to limbs of the tree, the same being some four feet apart, thus leaving the dying half-breed suspended by the arms directly in front of the still senseless Ames, whose head had fallen forward upon his breast, his face like that of a corpse, while the blood slowly trickled from his wound, and down his breast. With a feeling of insane triumph, George stepped backward, and stood viewing the horrible scene. There were now his two most bitter and deadly enemies, slowly dying together, in the dark murder-pregnant woods of the San Miguel. Truly, retribution had begun.

The eyes of the Mestizo, glazing in death, were filled with a soul-racking horror at being secured near to what he supposed was a corpse, having thus to pass his last moments on earth in the company of a dead man, filled his superstitious soul with the most terrible dread. The patterning of his life blood upon the leaves at his feet seemed like the hasty footsteps of fiends, speeding to bear him to never ending torment. No human being ever gazed upon a more repulsive sight than that which was presented by the dying Mestizo, hanging, with filming eyes fixed upon the exultant face of his slayer, even when the bonds that bound him to earth were snapping, one by one, his head sinking slowly forward, his wild tangled hair mingling with the soft curly locks of Frank Ames, and the breath seemed at last to have gone from him.

Then his wiry form, of a sudden, began to tremble and quiver spasmodically for a moment, the blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and Ignacio Valdez, the Mestizo mur-

derer and spy, had gone to answer for his many dastard crimes.

The dread experiences through which George Adler had, in such a little time, been called upon to pass, the suffering brought upon him by the severe blow he had received upon the head when hurled from his horse, the terrible anxiety of mind and soul that had been his since he reached the motte, and his discovery of the criminal traces of the bandits which proved that his loved one was in their power, together with the horror that had filled him later, upon seeing her hurried into the dark shades of the San Miguel by a horde of fiendish, war-painted Comanches—all this had so demoralized his brain that he did not appear, nor indeed was he, so to speak, the same being.

The scene before him, so full of horror, which his own irresistible vengeance had created, the awful stillness of the night, which caused him to think that even Nature bowed to his superior will, filled the young man with a new madness, with a frenzy of pride, he thinking himself now to be "monarch of all he surveyed," which, by the way, owing to the darkness, was not very much after all.

However, he had met and overcome his two greatest enemies, and in doing so had created a thirst for blood that had hitherto been unknown to him—that indeed was abhorrent to him. Thus possessed, he darted here and there amid the dense thickets, all the while slashing with the knife of the Mestizo, which he clutched in his hand, wandering about thus in his madness. After a time this feeling subsided; a listless apathy followed, and in that state he made his way slowly up the river through the heavy timber, unconscious of his course or object.

Thus he wandered for some distance, when he suddenly came to a halt, for the impatient stamping of horses of the Indians fell upon his ear from a point but a few yards ahead.

Once again he fell upon his hands and knees, and with the cunning of insanity hastened through the thick undergrowth, but without making any noise that would be noticed, outside of that which was caused by the restless mustangs.

At this time, very providentially for George Adler, nearly all the Comanches were collected together, but a pistol-shot distant, listening to the report of a spy, who had returned from an examination of the bandit camp.

George crawled onward, and upon peering through the branches of a thicket into a small clear space in the timber, he discovered a man lying prone upon the sward, face upward, and upon the gray hair and anguish-drawn features played a ray of moonlight, revealing vividly the well-known face of Colonel Bowen, who was bound hand and foot.

The mind of Adler had, through his recent dread experiences, been led to dwell more particularly upon avenging himself than aught else, and his recent success in that line had impressed him greatly; consequently, when he first saw the old colonel, the bitter enmity of the latter, in forbidding his daughter to associate with him, was at once brought to the front in the young man's mind. In his insane state, forgetting the one who should have been uppermost in his thoughts, and for whom he should have been searching, he stole stealthily forward, with the knife between his teeth, to the side of Colonel Bowen, whose bonds he instantly severed.

No sooner had George accomplished this feat in the very heart of the Comanche camp than he raised the stiff form of the old man and leaned him against the trunk of a large tree in the dense shade.

Colonel Bowen had suffered greatly in body and mind, and when he realized that he was free he was so dazed that he knew not whether he had been rescued by a friend, or had been cut loose to be carried to torture. The flitting glance he had caught of the face of the man who had severed his bonds was not that of one that would create confidence; for, notwithstanding that he had known Adler since his early childhood, he did not recognize him. But before he could collect his thoughts the young man, all blood-stained and with eyes glaring like coals, led one of the half-wild mustangs of the Indians up to the tree, and springing upon the animal's back, leaned over, and with a strength that was miraculous, dragged him upon the steed.

Colonel Bowen strove to speak, strove to ask his preserver, if such he was, to let him go, and to save his daughter, who was close at

hand; but when words did form upon his tongue, the sounds were drowned by a series of yells and whoops, and he realized that the horse, with its double load, was galloping through the thickets, and through a horde of savages, while bow-strings twanged, and cries of fury mingled with the hail of arrows that cut the foliage on every side. A wild, exultant yell burst from the man whom he now knew had preserved him from a terrible fate, but for which he could not thank him, as he preferred death with his child, to life without her.

The cry of the man seemed unnatural and inhuman, and his strange silence, together with the painful force of the grip with which he held him, caused the colonel much uneasiness, as the madman, for he was little less, dashed wildly through the thickets, and amid the drooping limbs, tearing his clothing and scratching his flesh unmercifully.

But the snorting and affrighted mustang was soon jerked to a halt, and springing to the earth, the strange being, who had evidently risked life to rescue him, supported his trembling steps toward a patch of moonlight, passing along a path; then, the colonel, as he was about to gain control over his feelings, and catch his preserver, found himself in another moment bound to a tree.

Filled with the utmost surprise and concern, Colonel Bowen gazed in front of him, as the strange man sprung aside; then his eyes stared in horror; his form trembled, as if struck with an ague fit, for, straight before him was a blood-stained form, and a face—Great God! yes, the same steely eyes, the same bloody froth upon the lips, the same expression—each, all, as vivid as upon that dread night when he drove the knife through flesh and bone. There, just before him, lighted up by the pale moon—oh, so ghastly!—with a background of blackness that was typical of dread and despair, was—yes, surely it was the same—Jack Ames, whom he had slain on the distant Trinity!

With a gurgling cry of horror and dread, the corpse of the Mestizo, though so near the other, not being observed by him, Colonel Bowen's head fell forward, and his frame hung limp and senseless upon the bonds that held him.

George Adler's eyes blazed with insane delight. He was having great success in thus rapidly disposing of his enemies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BANDITS ROUTED.

As George Adler went dashing through the Comanche camp, and the savages saw their captive thus borne away in the clutches of the maniac rider, they became furious, especially when the hoofs of the flying mustang went through the breast of a recumbent warrior, and the escape was made amid a volley of arrows fired in pursuit.

The piercing death-yell of this brave just as the hoofs of the snorting steed were over his form, and he realized that he was doomed, awakened the Indians to immediate action; but as they were on foot, and could not expect thus to stand before the mad, plunging advance of the mustang, their efforts were of no avail, and the sudden appearance of this single foe in their very midst so excited them that their arrows flew wild, and the darkness beneath the timber contributed to the success of the dash made by Adler through the woods.

When the madman and captive disappeared, the braves were furious; but, one, a brother of the warrior who had been crushed to death, was frantic, and demanded the immediate torture of the remaining captives, before they too should be rescued. They all thought that George Adler was one of the bandits, and that the men in the bend might possibly run in on them, and gain the battle.

However, spies were kept going and returning, reporting every movement made by Captain Caraniba and his men, and thus a surprise was rendered impossible. But, with all this precaution, the brave we have mentioned still clamored for the blood of the captive women, and many other warriors joined in the demand for torture.

Rolling Thunder, the chief, had decided in his own mind that both Maggie Moore and Belle Bowen should be taken to his far-away village. He had never before seen such beautiful squaws, and from the fact that Maggie had been taken from the ranch of Post Oak Bill, he believed her to be the daughter of that famous scout who had killed so many of his

braves, and he was filled with delight, and determined that the child of the great scout should sweep his lodge.

The squaws should taunt her, and whip her with rods; they should put upon her the most degrading duties. He would make her his slave, and degrade her below the dogs of his village. The squaws of the braves who had been slain by her father should tie her in torturing positions all night, at the fall of every moon, until she would ask the Great Spirit to take her to the desolate regions beyond the moon, where the grass is dead, where no game abounds, and she must wander forever amid the dry rocks for the water she would never find.

As for Belle, her daring and defiant manner, as well as her great beauty, had impressed the chief to such an extent that he resolved to make her one of his wives. His other squaws should wait upon her, and he would brain the one who dared offer her harm. She should be queen of his branch of the tribe.

All this had been decided by Rolling Thunder, and stepping within the muttering circle, he cried out:

"Creeping Coyote's brother has gone on the long dark trail. His blood calls for vengeance, but the blood of squaws pays not for warrior slain. My braves shall sound war-cries, and cheeks of Mexicans shall grow pale. Squaws of San Miguel, whose cheeks like prairie rose, go to village on plain. Creeping Coyote can have yellow squaw for torture, but he will be alone. Come, braves, war-path open. War-cries on lips. Rolling Thunder has spoken."

Then, striding toward the main part of the camp where the women were secured, and near where the mustangs, fully equipped, were kept in a compact mass, he detailed six braves to guard the captives, as Creeping Coyote, his snaky eyes filled with a thirst for blood, cut the thongs about the ankles of Rosa, the quadroon. Jerking the poor girl to her feet, the red fiend twisted his fingers in her curly hair, and dragged her, shrieking with terror, into the dark depths of the timber, while Belle and Maggie, both expecting to share her fate, gazed into each other's eyes in speechless horror.

As the vengeful Indian dragged Rosa away to the torture stake, Rolling Thunder led out his braves over the plain, to act their part in the strategic movements that were destined to annihilate the band of Capitan Caramba.

Six burly braves stood, lances in hand, to guard the beautiful captives, who, could they have done so, would have stopped their ears to drown the cries and shrieks of the poor quadroon.

These piercing screams caught the ear of the three scouts, causing them to balt suddenly, and listen, their senses almost paralyzed with horror.

The cries reached the point, too, where Warnona, gazing out over the plain, stood watching for her lord's coming, and her eyes flashed with the war-spirit of her people, as she saw Wild Wolf and his braves dashing wildly toward the San Miguel; but the pride, caused by this moving sight, was turned into one of concern, quickly changed into fury, as she realized that the fiends of the *llanos* were torturing their captives. Her eyes blazed, her form dilated, and, drawing her bow and arrow, she darted like an antelope through the timber, heedless of the drooping branches that tore her clothing.

As the scouts heard the shrieks, a groan of anguish burst from Sharp Eye, while Post Oak Bill fairly gnashed his teeth in a frenzy of rage.

"Come on, pard's!" cried Big Foot Wallace. "I'm a hashin' hellyuns now on the jump. Save the kalikers ef we wades in bleed!"

With these words he drew his knife, and they all plunged through the tangled thicket. But a short time did it take them, guided by the screams of the pretty quadroon, to reach the scene of torture, when a sight met their eyes which brought them to a halt in horror.

In front of them was a small opening, not more than ten feet across, the western side being clear of tall trees. In the middle of it was a conical mound, some four feet in height, the nature of which caused them to shudder, for they knew that it was a nest of the torturing red ants.

A small, but strong pecan sapling was bent over from the margin of the opening, and to it were bound fast the wrists of Rosa, the quadroon, her weight bending it in such a man-

ner as to cause her to stand directly upon the terrible mound. Her clothing had been torn from her form, and her flesh was gashed in a horrible manner, her eyes being torn from their sockets.

Just opposite, and between the scouts and poor Rosa, whose shrieks had now died away to low moans, stood Creeping Coyote, his hideous paint-daubed face filled with gloating exultation, his form drawn proudly erect, and his hands reeking with the blood of his innocent victim. It required a most powerful effort of will to act as the dread occasion demanded. No word of consultation or explanation, however, passed between the trio.

Big Foot sprung toward the sapling, while Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye dashed upon, and held Creeping Coyote to the earth. Big Foot wrenched the sapling top around, and cut the poor victim loose. He then cried out:

"Drag ther dangnation devil hyer! We'll g'in him a taste o' his own way o' tortur'!"

The scout's order was instantly obeyed. The Comanche, knowing that he was doomed, began his death-song.

"I'll stop that dang'd quick," said Bill, in a fury. "Mebbe so he's hed a hand in torturing Maggie!"

With these words, the infuriated scout cut off the tongue and tore off the scalp of the Indian.

"I'll take ther cuss's ha'r," he exclaimed; "for sich es be ain't fit ter go inter even an Injun he'ven."

Then Big Foot allowed the sapling to resume its previous position, dragging with it the Comanche to the top of the mound, when in an instant the red ants darted over his feet and limbs and began to cut in atoms the flesh from his body—a just retribution for Creeping Coyote.

Just as the scout laid poor Rosa in the bushes, the death rattle sounded in her throat, for a merciful God had taken her to himself, purified by a torture greater than that of fire.

"Thank ther Great Master! Ther poor gal air dead," said Wallace, as he lifted his sombrero from his head and looked skyward for an instant.

"Never spit out a word 'bout how ther poor gal died ter ther t'others, ef so be es they hes bin spared ter us," he said. "But come on; we'uns hes hefty work ahead. Ther reds an' Capitan Caramba air at hit, tooth an' nail, er I air muchly mistook. Come, pard's; I kin carve ther hull war-party. I'm b'ilin' over with simon-pure prussic acid hyderfoboy!"

It needed no words to prevail upon Bill and Sharp Eye to act promptly. All dashed forward, with the rage of panthers deprived of their young.

The dangers of the living overshadowed all duties to the dead. On they rushed, knowing that now if ever was the time to rescue the captives, before the return of the main portion of the war-party.

Assistance from the Wacos was now unexpected by the scouts, until it would probably be too late.

Guided by the directions Warnona had given them they were obliged to proceed with caution, as they approached the position which they supposed to be their objective point; and the woodcraft and judgment of Wallace was brought into use and put to good advantage at this critical time, for to make a miss and stumble into the presence of those who had been left to guard the captives, would only insure their death.

The giant scout was, by his coolness, enabled to keep his two pards within prudent bounds; but he knew if either of them discovered Maggie in anything like a perilous position, they would lose that caution and judgment so necessary to success; and that the brunt of the coming struggle would fall upon himself. He therefore gathered his forces, after giving orders that no arms except noiseless steel must be used.

Providentially the trio were led to point directly to the position occupied by the captives, and they were soon peering through the branches, within ten paces of the dark forms of the eight erect warriors who guarded the maidens.

The attention of the braves was directed toward the bend, from which arose the mad sounds of desperate fighting, which fact gave every advantage to the would-be deliverers.

There was no time for plans. Each of the three men braced himself, gripped his bowie tightly, and in gigantic bounds sprung forward,

Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye leaping at once upon the braves nearest to her whom they recognized as Maggie Moore.

The scene that followed baffles description. No dozen men, unprepared for such an attack could have successfully stood their ground before such a terrible trio. Bowies flashed like the lightnings of the Gulf; strong braves sunk to the earth, the death-yell gurgling in their throats, smothered by their own blood, without having seen their foes, or comprehended their color or character. For all the herculean efforts and play of steel, two braves kept free from the terrible *melee*, cut loose the maidens, and grasping them in their arms, ran like deer into the thickets toward the north plain; the scouts at this moment being engaged hand-to-hand with the three remaining warriors, the three others lying dead at their feet. All this happened in a moment's time. The next, when the scouts had hacked their foes to the earth and dashed over their bodies after the captives, having now no hopes of taking them alive, the twang of bow-strings sounded, followed by yells of agony, mingled with the Waco war-cry, and Wild Wolf and Warnona rushed into view, each bearing in arms one of the maidens, both being blood-stained and unconscious.

Wild Wolf placed Belle in the arms of Big Foot Wallace, while Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye folded their arms about little Maggie, all trembling with excitement, and muttering prayers of gratitude.

"No time talk," said Wild Wolf, imperatively. "War-path open. War-cry on lips. Heap fight down river. Put squaws up tree. Comanche no find. Warnona stay watch. My white brothers ride in fight with Wild Wolf. See, horses in bushes."

These quickly spoken words, not one being useless, were recognized by the scouts as words of wisdom and to the point. Warnona, comprehending what was expected of her, grasped two lariats, and sprung into the branches of a moss-draped tree which drooped near the ground.

In little more than a minute, Belle and Maggie were bound to these limbs, in an easy position, secure from observation, and Warnona, with bow ready and arrow fitted, crouched in the thick hanging moss, to guard with her life the senseless maidens.

"Now, pard's," said Big Foot, "I'm ready fer ther hellyuns; an' when kaliker ain't 'pendin' immejity 'pon me, I reckon I kin skupe in ha'r an' spill bleed, 'bout es speedy es ther nex' pilgrim. Hoop-la! I'm hunk now. Ther Angel air safe, an' leetle Maggie. Bullets air trumps, an' I hold a full hand!"

Springing upon an Indian mustang, the giant scout dug his spurs deep, jerked both revolvers, holding the weapons in his left hand; then, handling the jaw-strap after the manner of a full-blooded Comanche, he dashed after Wild Wolf, who had, on the instant, bounded through the wood upon his horse, and took his place at the head of the Waco braves.

Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye followed close after Big Foot, having secured two horses belonging to the Indians they had slain; and, in a few moments, broke out from the bottom into the north plain, where, before their eyes, in a long line galloping neck-and-neck, were a score and a half of brave Wacos, Wild Wolf at their head, and nearly all armed with some kind of gun, from an escopet to a Mississippi yager, some having old-fashioned muskets, besides the bows at their backs.

It was a grand sight; and, filled with a hatred the most intense for both red butchers and bandits, beyond all thirsting for revenge, with a hundred bloody outrages and terrible torture scenes in their minds, almost as vividly impressed as was the recent horrible fate of the quadroon, the scouts spurred on the half-wild steeds they rode, and dashed toward the bend, bugging the timber-line, and riding parallel with the Wacos on the plain, who, as has been mentioned, were discovered by Captain Caramba, as the latter made his escape to the cover of the thicket, having realized that his band was forever broken up, nine-tenths of them having been killed.

CHAPTER XXV. THE WACOS VICTORIOUS.

CAPTAIN CARAMBA was no fool. Indeed, had he not been gifted with good judgment, instantaneous in acting upon the same, and daring to a fault, he would not have been in command of the desperadoes and *ladrone*s of the Rio Grande.

Upon due reflection, he decided that the small party of Comanches who had tortured the friends of Frank Ames to death, and then galloped up the river bantering him to follow, would not have acted in the manner they did, had there not been reinforcements near at hand to back them; he therefore very prudently returned to his stronghold, resolved to get his men in order, and prepare for defense or attack.

However, he did not believe for a moment that a war-party of sufficient numbers to cope successfully with his well-armed band could be in the neighborhood; and, if so, they would not dare to attack him in a position so easy of defense as the bend.

Not for an instant did he entertain the thought of giving up Belle Bowen, without a hard struggle to repossess himself of his beautiful captive.

The very fact that she had been torn from him caused him to prize her the more highly; and her beauty and daring became magnified from the same cause. So it was that he made a mental vow that she should be his, even should he be forced to risk his life a score of times to regain her.

With well selected words, spoken to act upon the revengeful dispositions and the avarice of his men, he influenced them into the same train of thought, until they were eager to attack the Indians; fully believing, as their chief had asserted, that it was the Comanches who killed the driver of the wagon, and carried off the fifty thousand dollars in gold.

Capitan Caramba had not spoken of this, however, until he had gotten his followers greatly excited and furious for revenge; as he knew that, in their calm moments, they would reason, and correctly, that neither the murder of the driver nor taking the captives from the wagon could be the work of Indians; for the latter would have scalped the man, stolen the horses, and packed the animals with the blankets and other valuables in the wagon.

As soon as the bandit chief arrived at the bend, he sent the Mestizo up the river as a spy, to ascertain the force and position of the Indians; and also the state and location of the captives. He had seen, as well as his men who were with him at the scene of torture, that there were two female prisoners in the midst of the Comanches; the men supposing that one had been captured at some ranch previous to their having discovered the wagon; but the presence of this second female explained to Capitan Caramba the mystery of the escape, and the killing of the teamster. He felt sure that one of the slaves had been secreted in the Dearborn, and had released the colonel and Beile; that the former had then knifed the driver, and then all escaped to the plain, where the Indians had discovered and captured them. Nothing of this, however, did he hint at to his followers, for the very obvious reasons that we have mentioned.

After his men had been furnished with ammunition, and were ready for fight, Capitan Caramba galloped his horse back and forth, cursing with fury at the delay of Ignacio, the spy. Had he been able to pierce the darkness and foliage, and see the terrible sight at the tree up the river, the curses would have died on his lips. But, as it was, every moment the outlaw chief grew more furious, until at length the yells of the Comanches, as George Adler galloped through their camp, broke out loud and clear, causing the bandits to look upon one another in amazement; a feeling which also began to rule their leader. Here was another mystery. The question now was, who could be attacking the Indians? True, no guns had been fired, but notwithstanding this, Capitan Caramba knew that enemies were, or had been, in the Comanche camp. Again he cursed the Mestizo into the bottomless pit for not relieving his anxiety. This feeling was now doubled by his hearing a series of the most piercing shrieks that told of some one—and a female at that—being tortured. Quick as a flash, the thought came into his mind that it was Belle Bowen! That he was now being robbed of the only one who had ever made an impression upon his stony heart. So he spurred at break-neck speed toward the neck of the bend, close followed by his desperate crew. He halted suddenly, for, out on the moonlit plain, in all their paraphernalia of savage war, dashed a long line of warriors.

One close after the other, out from the dense shades they came, near two-score in number, as all could see, when the last had

broken cover; then, the front having reached a point south of the entrance to the bend, all, at a signal from their chief, twitched their mustangs half about, and facing the same.

There they sat their horses, a crescent of red fiends, for once having a foe in their front who deserved no mercy from them, or from any one.

Capitan Caramba laughed long and derisively, waving his sombrero, for he did not suppose that the Indians would dare charge, with their inferior weapons, upon his splendidly armed force.

The Comanches, however, took no notice of the laughter and gestures of derision and banter, but sat their steeds silent, and more terribly impressive for being silent, and perfectly motionless.

Thus they sat, while the shrieks of agony, that tortured all ears except those of the red-men of the plains, sounded on the still night air, although growing weaker and weaker.

Keeping the same position, the bandits twisting on their saddles, nervous and impatient, the silent and motionless Comanches unmanning them more by acting in this way than if they had been charging in wild war-whoops, and amid a hurtling shower of arrows and glittering lances into the bend.

So the crescent of red warriors remained, until from out the timber the shriek of a panther drowned for an instant the feeble screams of the tortured woman in the distance; then, as one man, with loud, far-sounding war-whoops waking the echoes of the night, the line of braves, with lances in reserve, and arrows fitted to their bows, dashed at headlong speed upon their snorting mustangs, the hair of horses and riders flying wild, the braves bent forward, their black eyes glittering in the moonlight, and a savage thirst for blood distorting their paint-smeared visages.

No sooner did the Comanche war-cries cut the air than Capitan Caramba whirled his horse facing his men, and yelled:

"Into line, all! Wait until you see the bows bend, then each of you pick his opposite red! Sling rifles after first fire; draw sixes, and give the red devils hot lead as fast as you can cock and pull!"

On came the yelling horde. The thundering tramp of the steeds, as their hoofs struck the earth in concert, sounding like far-off thunder, the Comanche chief leading the savage charge!

Suddenly, as the bows of the horsemen in the front were brought up from the shoulders of the mustangs, ready to bend and send the terrible shafts on their mission of death, and as the rifles of the bandits were being jerked to shoulder, the twang of many bow-strings sounded from the rear of the outlaws, and before the latter could catch sight on the warriors in their front, dashing like an avalanche upon them, a score of arrows hurtled among them from the bushes that bordered their grazing ground, sending nearly as many to earth, with shrieks of agony; the horses of the slain and wounded dashing here and there in frantic flight, stamping their fallen masters with their fast-flying hoofs.

Then followed a scene that neither pen nor pencil could describe or paint.

The bandits, never having expected that they would be called upon to contend with Indian foes who would perform such a strategy as to cross the river through the limbs of the trees, and under the protection of a threatened charge in front when the attention of all was there drawn and held, were appalled and thoroughly demoralized; and although those who were not killed or wounded pulled trigger, their bullets for the most part flew wild, and the next moment a murderous volley of arrows from the main war-party caused the bandits to jerk their horses about to avoid the next and quick following flight of steel-pointed missiles.

This movement was their ruin; for, although they drew their revolvers, they were too late in bringing the weapon into use. Too late; for in a moment's time after slinging their now useless rifles, the outlaws found themselves struggling amid a mob of warriors, whose blood-curdling yells could not drown the piercing, agonizing cries of the wounded.

Striving in vain to keep his men in order, and breasting the savage charge with a desperate daring that, as he shot down braves as fast as they presented themselves, commanded the admiration of the Comanches themselves, Capitan Caramba at last drove spurs and fought himself away from the horrible bend

that seemed suddenly turned into a pandemonium, a fighting field for fiends. No sooner had the outlaw chief cleared himself from the battling horde, than, as he cast a quick glance around in quest of a place of refuge, he saw upon the plain another war-party of Indians, speeding like dry leaves before a "norther," to the scene of the conflict. The end was not yet.

Filled with horror unspeakable, his followers all either killed, wounded or reserved for torture, or else fugitives in the bottom-timber, Capitan Caramba, with death staring him in the face on all sides, urged his horse madly into the thickest shades; there, panting from exertion and struck with a deathlike horror, the bandit chief waited the progress of events.

At the very moment that Capitan Caramba thus succeeded in making his escape from the bend, the Comanche yells of victory rung loud and clear, while here and there braves were to be seen springing from their steeds and tearing the reeking scalps from Mexican and whites, now and then, however, being themselves wounded by bullets from the few bandits who had escaped the massacre. These now straggled through the bottom thickets, striving to collect together, by signals, and thus to defend themselves against skulking reds who were now hunting them like blood-hounds.

It was while thus occupied, and totally unconscious of danger to themselves, indeed not dreaming that foes were near them, that the Comanches were suddenly startled at the sound of thundering hoofs, and the next moment the Wacos, their wild war-whoop sounding shrill, dashed in an overwhelming charge into the bend; while galloping through their flank to their rear, shooting down all before them, rode like the wind Big Foot Wallace, Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye, by this movement placing themselves in the rear of the foe, to cut off the retreat of those who had on foot crawled through the branches to attack the bandits from behind, the scouts having seen at once that there were a score of braves who had no horses.

Rolling Thunder began to perceive that his war party was doomed, and with half-a-dozen of his most distinguished warriors, made a dash at a lance charge, and himself with three braves escaped to the timber above the bend.

Then followed a massacre. The wild, exultant whoops of the Wacos, the rattle of fire-arms, the dying groans and shrieks of agony, sounding on the still morning air. The moon, as if horrified at the dread scenes of the night, sinking below the western horizon, as the gray streaks of the morning shot up to the east.

When Capitan Caramba saw that all was now lost, and that his only refuge was on the Rio Grande, he guided his horse slowly up the San Miguel, beneath the cover of the timber, resolving to ascertain if Belle Bowen still lived, and if so, and guarded by a few braves, he determined to recapture her, and bear her away to Mexico, thus averting himself in some measure for the disaster that had been brought upon him through her, and plunging George Adler, the man he had robbed of his fortune in the beginning, into hopeless despair.

He had detested his foster-brother from the very first. The studious habits of George, and the favoritism very naturally shown by Major Adler to his son, had first caused the feeling. But, in his own heart, he knew George to be more truthful and honorable than himself—in fact, more of a man in every way—and he exulted in defrauding him and his father of such a large amount as would leave them comparatively poor.

But, with all this, he had been compelled to feel a great respect for Major Adler, who had given him a home and an education; who had, indeed, been as kind to this unworthy son of his adoption, as any man could have been to a child that was not his own.

When Dudley Duncan absconded with the property of his benefactor, he had, in reality, taken but a small sum with him. The great bulk of the money he had possessed himself of, he had secreted in a hollow tree on the Adler estate, dropping the gold coins, one by one, down a hole made by a wood-pecker.

This was a great satisfaction to him now, as he resolved to disguise himself, go back to the Trinity, secure his treasure, and then fly to Mexico.

But best of all would be to rob George Adler of the maiden he loved. This would be a surfeit of revenge for all his boyish grievances,

real or imaginary, and he laughed fiendishly at the thought, imagining himself the owner of a grand *hacienda* across the Rio Grande, with the beautiful Belle as his mistress, and *pesos* at his command without number.

With these pleasant anticipations, Capitan Caramba rode stealthily on, calculating the location of the captives by the sounds that he had heard previous to the attack, and from the point at which the Comanches had left the timber to charge over the plain.

Rolling Thunder and his three braves also took to the timber, with the intention of carrying away the captives, supposing, of course, that the eight warriors were still guarding them.

The three scouts also, as soon as the battle was won, sped in haste to the rescued maidens in the tree; all filled with anxiety in regard to what must now be their critical condition, after experiencing such horrors, and also fearing that stragglers from among the bandits or Comanches might discover, and perhaps murder them.

The absence of George Adler, as well as of Colonel Bowen, was a mystery; but the scouts were forced to the conclusion that all three had been killed.

Consequently, while the victorious and exultant Wacos were scalping the slain, these three parties were, at different distances, all stealing up the river toward the Comanche camp; and, while Warnona sat ensconced in her mossy retreat, watching the pallid faces of the two half-dead girls, Maggie and Belle, and without the slightest thought or premonition of danger, two parties were approaching, and both alike eager to secure her unconscious charges.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"NONE BUT THE BRAVE DESERVE THE FAIR."

CAPITAN CARAMBA was the first to come upon the heap of dead braves, slain by the scouts, and above which were the captives and Warnona, the bow of the latter half bent, and arrow fitted to the string, ready at any moment to send the deadly shaft into the heart of the bandit chief, should occasion require it.

However, the Waco squaw was not called upon to do such an act, for the outlaw hearing horsemen approach spurred his mustang into a thicket, and halted, secure from view.

Presently Big Foot Wallace, Post Oak Bill and Sharp Eye dashed up, and paused under the tree where the girls were hidden.

Gazing up the tree, Sharp Eye asked quickly:

"Warnona, are you there?"

"Warnona, here" was the answer; "and the white lilies heap sick. No talk. No see."

"We must get the girls down, and out of this terrible place," said Sharp Eye, "or they will die."

"Hold yer mustang a minnit," advised Big Foot. "Thar mought be a sprinklin' o' hell-yuns a skutin' 'roun' permiscu's like till yit."

Post Oak Bill had stepped quickly to the trunk of the tree, and while Big Foot spoke he was gazing upward; but the whisk of a horse's tail in the thicket near him, warned him of danger, and he quickly fired his revolver in that direction.

Instantly there was a loud shriek, and out from the undergrowth rolled a horse in the agonies of death, crushing its rider beneath its quivering body, as its hoofs beat the air.

Big Foot jerked the man out from the dying horse, and set him against a tree. The face of the stranger was pallid, and blood was issuing from his lips, while his eyes glared wildly.

"Dog-gone, my panther-cat!" exclaimed the Giant Scout; "ef that ain't the cantankerous cuss, Capitan Caramba, I'll chaw bugs an' snakes fer grub, for ther nex' six months."

Sharp Eye and Post Oak Bill looked into the face of the apparently dying man, the horn of the saddle, as the horse reared upward and fell backward, having crushed through the ribs into his vitals. As his eyes now became fixed upon the young scout, he said in a hoarse whisper, which ~~blew a strong gust of wind~~ from his lips:

"Come here; bend down to me, Eddie Bowen, or Duval, if you so call yourself."

"In Heaven's name, who are you?" asked Sharp Eye, in astonishment, as he bent his ear to the mouth of the outlaw.

"El Capitan Caramba, once Dudley Duncan, the adopted son of Major Frank Adler; but never so black as I have been painted. Where are the captives?"

"Safe in that tree over our heads," was the reply.

"Did you know that Belle, your sister, was one of them?"

Until this moment, such had been the anxiety and excitement of Sharp Eye, that he had forgotten what Wallace had told him in regard to Colonel Bowen and Belle being in the vicinity and in danger; but all was now recalled, and he trembled with emotion at the thought of the two who were dearest to him of all on earth, who had been in such fearful peril. As he was about to spring up the tree in this fresh excitement, a gasping whisper again came from the dying man, who asked:

"Where is George Adler?"

"None on us knows," put in Big Foot Wallace. "But we hopes he ain't gone up jist yit!"

"Tell him to look in the trunk of the old oak, where he fought me for robbing the birds' nest long ago. There—is—his—father's—gold!"

At the last word a spasm shook the frame of the dying bandit, blood gushed from his mouth and nostrils, and his head sunk forward, his eyes glaring wildly for a moment, then turning glassy, as the soul of Dudley Duncan, alias Capitan Caramba, went—God knows where!

As soon as the three men realized that the noted outlaw was dead, they all went to work with a will to revive the captives, who were brought tenderly down, and carried out on the plain, there being laid upon blankets, Warnona bathing their heads, and doing all in her power to relieve them. But the poor girls were so prostrated with fright, horror, and physical suffering, that when they did revive, and found their friends around them, only low moans came from their lips.

The horses were caught, and harnessed to the Dearborn, which was found at the bend but slightly injured by bullets, blankets were spread in the bottom of the vehicle, and the maidens were conveyed under an escort of Wacos to the ranch of Post Oak Bill. Black Bear, who arrived too late for the fight, he having galloped up the Medina too far to discover the Wacos in time to avoid a trip to the Bandera Hills was now dispatched to Pleasonton for a physician.

Big Foot Wallace and Post Oak Bill, after the departure of Sharp Eye with the maidens, and the greater number of the Wacos, set about a thorough search for the colonel and George Adler, the bodies of neither of them having been discovered among the dead; and not long was it before the horrible spectacle in the bottom-timber broke upon them. Although not as dread and terrible as when illuminated by the moon, it was sufficiently so to fill the scouts with cold chills, and cause them to halt in their tracks in amazement.

Before them were the Mestizo and Frank Ames, both stone dead. Near at hand was Colonel Bowen, secured to a tree, senseless but alive, and the key to the horrible sight and the puzzling position of the three bodies, lay between the same; outstretched upon the sward, knife in hand, was none other than George Adler. His face burned with fever, his heart was beating like the rattle of a drum, and his eyes glared vacantly up among the green leaves, while his parched lips muttered childish texts and prayers, or laughed wildly, as insane thoughts controlled him.

The old scouts could not repress a tear, as they saw what must have been the sufferings of the young man and the colonel; and they felt positive that it was the former who had killed the half-breed whom he had caught in the act of murdering Frank Ames.

Colonel Bowen and George Adler were both taken to the cabin of Post Oak Bill, which, for a number of weeks, was more like a hospital than a cattle ranch, as the doctor from Pleasonton was forced to remain during the run of brain fever, with which both the colonel and George were afflicted.

Maggie and Belle, however, speedily recovered, and were assiduous in their care of the sick. The Wacos encamped just above the corrals permanently, at the request of Post Oak Bill.

But, dear reader, we must now wind up this tale, so truly descriptive of border life.

George Adler was not long in finding the immense sum of money that Dudley Duncan had secreted in the oak, it having been too heavy for him to carry away.

The box containing the fifty thousand dollars, thrown from the wagon by Colonel Bowen, was found on the prairie, and immediately upon the colonel's recovery was given to Sharp

Eye, who, to please Belle, as well as the old gentleman, agreed to be known in future as Edward Bowen.

The scouts, with the aid of Wild Wolf buried from sight forever the mutilated bodies of the three men, Barnes, Walker, and Stephens, who met their terrible fate through being induced by the flattering promises of Frank Ames to aid the latter in his cowardly and criminal project to gain the hand of Belle Bowen in marriage.

Frank Ames and Ignacio the Mestizo, together with Dudley Duncan, or Capitan Caramba, were buried side by side in the same grave, and Big Foot Wallace decided that it was a "perty 'propriate plant."

All the horses of the Comanches and the bandits, with the plunder of both camps, were allotted to the gallant Wacos, the squaws of the slain receiving the share that would have fallen to their braves, had the latter survived.

Great was the surprise and relief of Edward Bowen, on ascertaining that he had not killed Frank Ames in the duel; and that his forced wanderings, under that impression, had been unnecessary, although he was very glad that in consequence of this belief, he had met his great happiness, in gaining the love of Maggie Moore, whom otherwise he might never have known.

The experiences of George Adler, during his temporary madness, were as a horrid nightmare, more than anything having the semblance of reality, and they were never referred to, either by himself or by Colonel Bowen.

When the colonel and Belle were informed of the real name and character of Capitan Caramba, they were no longer surprised at the knowledge he had displayed in regard to them and their affairs, when they were in his power.

The remains of poor Rose were laid to rest beneath the drooping moss of an oak, far from the last terrible scene of her earthly sufferings; and the horrors of her death were never made known to either Maggie or Belle.

The stock of Post Oak Bill was purchased by Edward Bowen, and the ranch was deserted, although Bill and Big Foot often climbed up to Maggie's nest in the old tree, and conversed about the daring and heroism which their darling had displayed amid the fearful dangers she encountered, and the bravery and faithfulness, even unto death, of the Mexican boys, Juan and Antonio, both of whom were buried where they fell, at the foot of the giant oak. Often, in after days, when Maggie and Belle together visited the spot to decorate their grave with prairie flowers, the former would recount their desperate deeds of daring in her defense.

After Colonel Bowen's recovery, he was a changed man. He really believed in his own mind that George Adler had been informed by Frank Ames, previous to the death of the latter at the tree—the knowledge of Frank's death, and the place and manner of it having been communicated to the colonel, dispelled the notion he had taken up of the ghost of Jack Ames—in regard to that note for twenty-five thousand dollars, and possibly much more from the buried and unhappy past; so he offered no further objections to the marriage of George and Belle. Indeed, he expressed himself as strongly in favor of it, after he ascertained that George had recovered his father's gold.

George Adler, however, had some cause to be jealous, as Edward Bowen, who, with Maggie Moore and the two scouts, accompanied the colonel, with Belle and George, back to the Trinity, was almost continually monopolizing the society, not only of Maggie, but of Belle, from whom he had been so long separated.

In due course of time, the double marriage was celebrated with great *eclat*, the scouts and Wild Wolf being present, and all of whom received handsome gifts from the old colonel. The latter, soon after, at the earnest request of Belle, seconded by George and Edward, and encouraged by the scouts and the Waco, sold out his plantation and all his effects, and located with his children, at a safe point on the Medina, where they prospered in the stock business, were made happy in the love of each other, and doubly so, when they were visited, as they frequently were, by Wild Wolf, Warnona, and the scouts—Post Oak Bill, who, after Maggie's marriage, "pardoned" continually with his giant friend on the plains—and the celebrated King of the Post Oaks,

"BIG FOOT WALLACE."

THE END.

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